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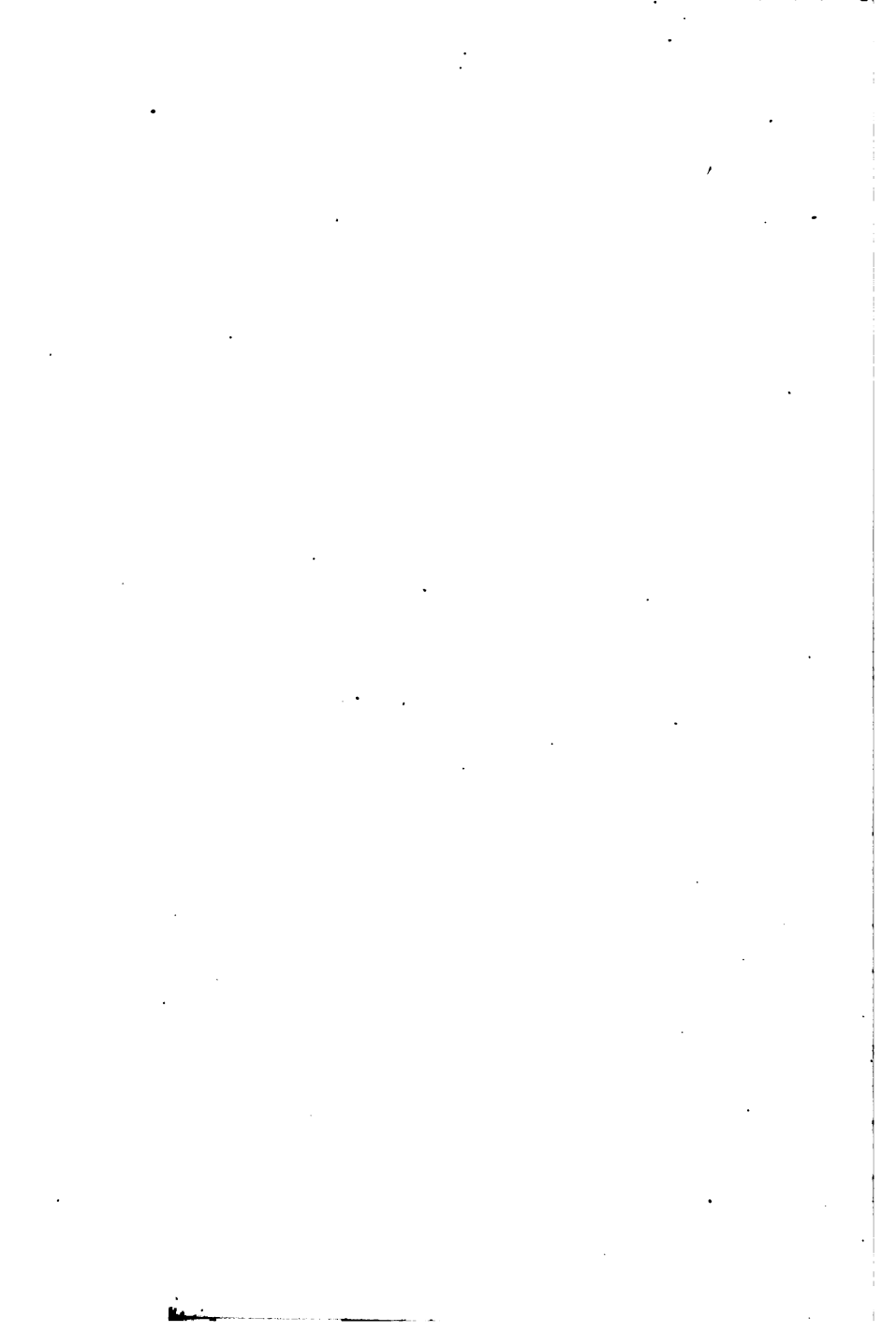
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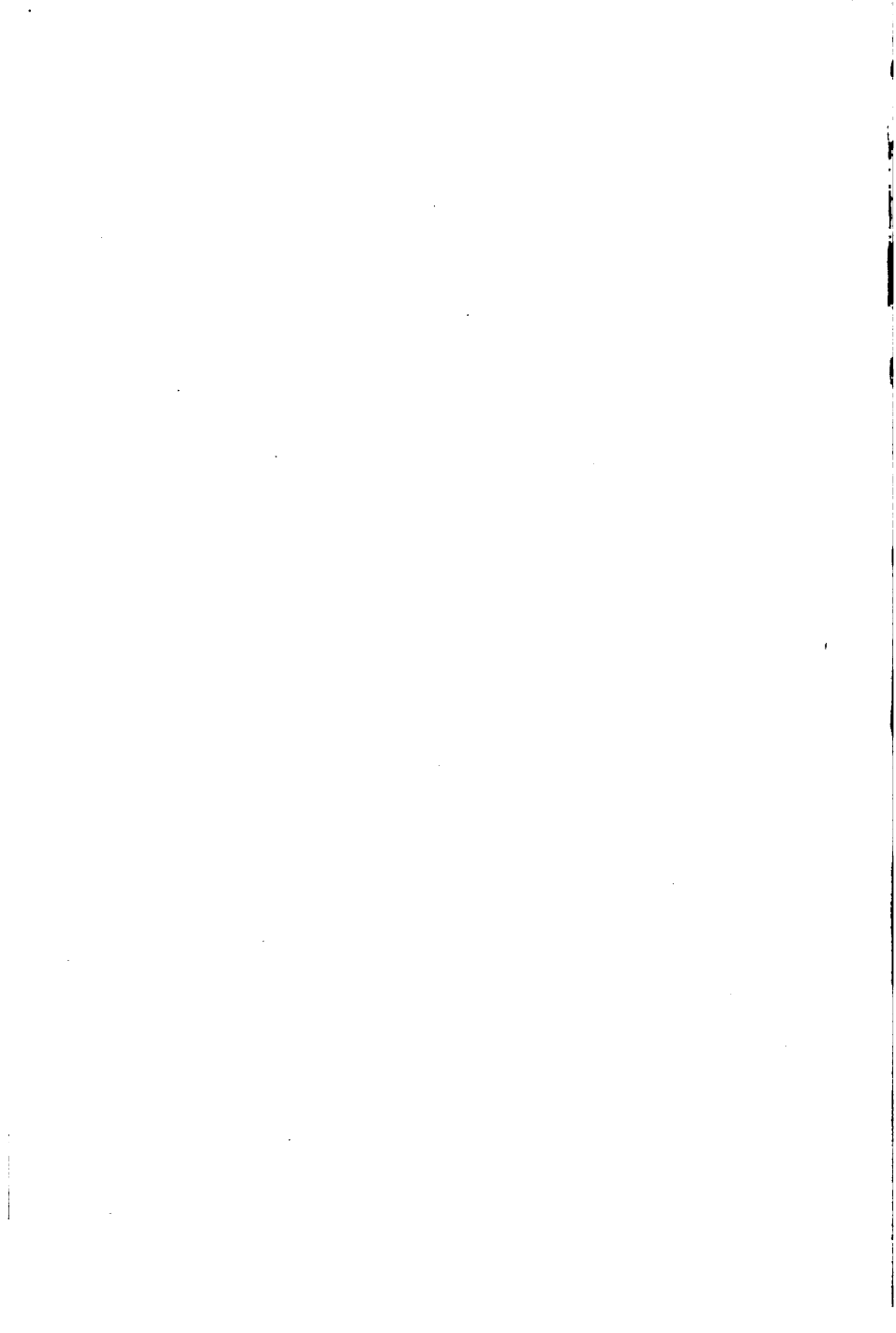
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Her Soul and Her Body

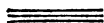


Her Soul and Her Body

BY

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



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ABSTRACT

HER SOUL AND HER BODY

PART I

I

WHEN I was a little girl my father often tried to kiss my mother but she would draw away from him, and say, "Not before Missy." And then father would laugh a little, and sigh out, "What a queer lot we Yankees are!"

I thought they were too old and respectable to care about each other. But one day I saw him with his arms about her and her head on his shoulder, while he rubbed his cheek against hers. He had come home from a trip to Boston and mother had met him in the hall. I was upstairs looking over the banisters. She had worn a wonderful look as she ran to him, but first she had closed the front door.

My heart beat, and I was very proud to have such a thing happen among us. But I knew I should never be able to boast of it to Everett Austen, my playmate in the next house. It wasn't like having money to brag about as in Everett's case.

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2. HER SOUL AND HER BODY

I thought about it a good deal — too much, I expect, for a girl of eight. I grew very sad and wondered if I had better kill myself rather than always be in the way when my parents wanted to kiss each other. Some nights I believed that I was an adopted child and that she couldn't kiss him before me because I wasn't one of the family. As I grew older and compared notes, I found that almost all of the girls at one time or another thought they were adopted. Of course, not any of us had been.

I never told mother that I feared I had been left on the doorstep. Once when I was dragging myself to bed without offering to bid her good night, she said, "What's the matter, Melissa Robinson?" — but kindly — and at that I climbed into her lap and cried myself to sleep. She cuddled me, which was what I wanted. And she always kissed me, even before strangers. In that way I learned that loving a daughter is different from loving a husband — at least in New England.

I was not very bright in school, but I found out some of the mysteries of life — felt them — quicker than other girls did. I can't remember when I didn't know about such things, yet a number of my friends had to be taken aside and told by their mothers. "Advanced mothers" they are called in New Washington.

My mother died when I was nine, so we didn't

have a chance to grow very intimate. But even had she lived, we would have been embarrassed when speaking of such things. It is much better to know of it all the time, and not have to go begging your family, and then whispering about it with the other girls at the foot of the garden behind the currant bushes. I always hid any wonderful secrets like that. I seemed to be able to put them in my heart and lap it right over like a leather purse.

Had my father not been a man, I mean had he been a woman, I could have talked freely with him. But then father had a weak strain. He was a lawyer but he didn't make as much money as did Everett's father. Everett's family still live next door to our old home and Mr. Austen has the finest hardware shop in the north. When Everett and I were quite little he taunted me because we didn't make much money. I used to wonder why father couldn't manage to do as well as Mr. Austen, and at last I discovered that he wrote poetry.

A verse about "The Joy of Being Alive" was printed in the *New Washington Banner*, I remember, and there was a word from the editor which ran something like this: "We are glad that the contributor finds it sufficient reward to be alive, as any pressing obligation to pay for this piece of poetry would have resulted in its return. Write again, 'Anonymous.'"

I recall it, for mother read out loud that part of the "Vox Populi" column even before she did the stanzas. "But read the lines," father had replied — eagerly — like a boy.

She put down the paper in a flash and whispered to him: "You've written that piece of poetry yourself. Don't deny it. Of course I'm proud of you, but for goodness sake, don't let it get round that you make up rhymes. You'll lose all your practice."

He tried to reassure her, and said that no one would ever know, that he kept them locked up in his desk. And I don't believe any one ever did find out, but still we never had much money. I guess the quality that makes one write poetry keeps one from selling it.

I didn't tell mother because I wasn't supposed to have heard — besides it would have discouraged her so much, but I wanted to be a poetess for a long time after that. Sometimes I wrote things while hiding by the currant bushes but I always buried them in the earth so that the secret wouldn't get out. Now that I am sixteen and can look back upon life, I find that almost everything that we do which we like has to be buried in one way or another.

Mrs. Andrews had come to help with the housework a year before mother died. She was a widow with very slender means and the arrangement was excellent. Even so, mother continued

to fail, and one night while I was asleep she passed away very quickly. No one, not even father, realized how ill she was, although, one may be sure, mother knew.

Father didn't make any effort whatever to hide his grief, and for years afterwards I could hear the ladies at the sewing circle discussing under their breaths the way he sobbed at the funeral; he wouldn't leave the grave, although it kept the minister standing about. They used the same hushed tone that they employed when speaking of Ellie Morton who ran away with a troupe once. And when poor father died (kissing me but still going), they were all indignant. They thought he ought to have stayed on if only to look after me.

"Perhaps he couldn't help it," I once screamed out rebelliously. "He had typhoid fever."

Even though they were sorry that I had overheard, they wouldn't give in an inch. "He should have tried more," was the general suggestion.

Father's weakness in going away seemed to be a sort of stigma which I would have to live down. At times I got mixed from puzzling over things so much. I seemed to be the stigma itself. Whenever I was careless, and forgot to buy the bread, or stayed out in the woods until I was late to supper, I would seem to feel that the weak part of him was going on and that people would al-

ways remember his faults because I was always there to remind them. I have determined a number of times to be strong, so as to represent father as well as possible.

Every one has been very kind to me in New Washington since I've become an orphan. The town council arranged for me just as they do the band concerts. I mean I was as important. Mrs. Andrews was to stay on and rent the rooms in our house and I was to live with her until I was old enough to do for myself. There wasn't enough capital to invest, but I was to use as little as possible and keep the sum for educational purposes.

I have never grown close to Mrs. Andrews but I didn't grow away from her and we have gone on side by side in a parallel. I was glad that I had so many secrets shut into my heart like money in a purse to think about. And there were pleasant things outside the house. When there is not a good deal of affection in a girl's home she goes elsewhere for it. And I went. Of course mothers didn't kiss me, as that is not the custom in New Washington. Perhaps that is why I enjoyed parties where we played games like Pillow and Post Office.

From twelve to fourteen I played these games, but within the last two years I have found out that being kissed by any boy doesn't mean much, except that it is nice to be chosen. Even when I

was little, though, I was never chosen by all the boys the same evening. There was always a particular one, and I didn't mind, for he would never leave me. The girls called it a "steady."

Going to high school sobered us a great deal for that gave us something to live up to. Still, the girls had good times but more dignified, and in pairs. There were picnics, and hammocks, and moonlight drives. And boys used to carry our books home from school, then hang over the gates until mothers and my Mrs. Andrews would call us in.

It was during my first year that Everett began to notice me again. When I was twelve he was sixteen and wouldn't play with me any more, but when I was fifteen he was nineteen, and we seemed to be of the same age.

Everett is a little fellow and has been fat right from the start. I really don't know how he looks for his face goes away from me when he isn't around, and when I am with him he is so kind that I don't notice. No one falls in love with him because you don't love people for being kind. You ought to, but you don't. I was pleased to walk home from school with him, though, as he was the most prominent young man in New Washington. Besides, he was preparing for Harvard and had been down there twice to take some examinations, and each time came back to prepare some more.

I never got tired of hearing about Boston for father loved it so, and had said that some day he was going to take me with him. Everett would tell me of the narrow streets, and the big shops, and how every one had a "finish" who went there that one couldn't get in any other place. He said we should all acquire something like a "finish." It was our duty.

Once we stood at the gate until dark and as we talked of Boston he put his hand over mine, and I let him. But when he suddenly kissed me I didn't like it and drew away.

"But, Missy, you let me hold your hand," he said. He was very much astonished.

I was going to tell him that I let him because he had been describing Boston to me. As he spoke of its beauty, the city wrapped me about in a sort of web of love, and it was Boston that had laid a hand on my hand. When he kissed me, bumping his nose against mine, it gave me a sort of nausea and I drew away sharply. I was too old to play Pillow and it couldn't mean anything else to me with Everett. It simply couldn't.

But I didn't explain anything to him. He wouldn't have grasped that, in a way, he had stood for Boston. I went up the walk swinging my books by the strap. Mrs. Andrews came to the hall door, blotting out a good deal of the light behind her — large, but no curves.

"Melissa Robinson, march right in here to your supper," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," I replied.

She was cross, but I didn't notice. I was still thinking of the wonderful place that my father loved. I went up to my room. There was a patch of young moonlight on my bed, and I sank down in it. The silver dressed me beautifully, and I sat up very straight, smiling and nodding to people. I was driving through the streets of Boston greeting my friends. They were very friendly streets, too, and all were beautiful.

When Mrs. Andrews called me a second time I ran to pull down my shade before lighting the lamp. And there was Everett still at the gate. I had forgotten all about him!

II

ALL that was over a year ago. I was sixteen last June and now it is winter. Everett managed to get into college in the autumn and as soon as he went away I couldn't imagine how he looked, but Boston remained clear in my mind. It was so strange that he who was like a glass of water, should be able to go, when I couldn't. So strange that mere money could do it.

Lots of times I went down Main Street to look into the Austen hardware store. Spades and lawn mowers were giving him this opportunity — Everett hadn't anything to do with it. Everything that happens to me must be the result of my own effort. This frightens me a little, and I want to die so as to be shut in close. Yet at the same time I want to live for I am curious to see how I am going to end. I should hate to have New Washington the end.

Main Street curves down to the depot and the early part of this winter I took to watching the men from the hotel go down the hill to take the Boston train. It was not the men that were mysterious, but their valises. There is a sort of wise, traveled air about an old valise that is more engaging than the young man carrying it.

Often after school I went with my friends to see the five o'clock express come in. We drove down in buggies and sort of went past as though we had not intended to. The great train, coming straight up from the city, was very exciting, but the girls would say: "One, two, three, four getting off and all going to the hotel!" These men were usually drummers, and they would lift their hats to us before they climbed into the bus. Then my friends would throw up their heads proudly, and, slapping the reins, would drive around the block in a hurry. In that way we would meet them as they were approaching the hotel, and scream with laughter so that they would notice us again.

I think we would have died of fright had any of these men ever overtaken us on the street while we were walking. It seems to be buggies that saved us. I never saw any one drummer that I liked better than the other, but they were all interesting because they knew Boston. My friends had their particular idols among them, and spoke of them as "Warwick" or "Valdemar," or whatever name seemed best suited to their style of beauty.

I must have spent a great deal of time looking at the valises that went down the hill with the travelers, for it was finally remarked upon by one of the town council. He sat all day in the hotel window and had time to observe. Mrs. An-

drews was very humiliated when he came to see her. She said she had tried to bring me up decently. Just as I would have expected, the member of the council seemed to feel that the fault lay in not having a buggy. It was not low to drive past, but it was low to linger.

After him came his wife. Mrs. Andrews had to get in the habit of changing her dress every afternoon. Quite rightly she blamed me for it, although it must have given her a certain satisfaction to have the best people calling — and driving up in surreys. The caller said that they were beginning to realize that I was growing into a woman. Mrs. Andrews replied that I was rather skinny and undersized, so she didn't see how that could be. "But her size has nothing to do with her being a woman," argued the lady. I was amazed that she could know so much. "More than that, Melissa fills out the street when she walks," she complained.

Mrs. Andrews could only say, "Land sakes, that midget!" and I was confused, too, about myself. It seemed that all the time I was getting the atmosphere of the traveling men's valises, the traveling men were getting an atmosphere about me that I didn't know I possessed. They are like poor Everett, for I don't know how any of them look.

After that I stopped going down Main Street. I was afraid. Boston hadn't the fear for me that

staring eyes have. Eyes are so personal. But the calling continued, and grew more interesting as the winter advanced, for they began to discuss my future. Having a future is wonderful. I would not stop at the gate a moment when I came home, but ran into the house. If no one was there I would take off my things, shake the base burner, then sit down at the window behind the crooked geraniums and wait for the town council. Some of them had girls of my own age, and they would look at me kindly and say, "Well, Melissa, how are you getting on at school. Second year, hey?"

Asking about school was a painful question, for I was not getting on at all. The announcement of this to the town council by the principal, came at about the same time that it was discovered that I had very little money left in the bank. They decided I had best seek a career as soon as I could pick one out. They sat back. It seemed to be very easy to them after that.

"We had figured, Melissey," said one of them, "that bein' a teacher in the grade school was about the right pursuit for you."

I laughed out loud, then Mrs. Andrews made me apologize. "I haven't sense enough," I explained. The visitor admitted it solemnly, and so did Mrs. Andrews. "But I want to earn my living, and I'd be glad to perfect myself in something. I don't just know in what, yet I am sure,

I shall find a way." I was going to say a beautiful way, but I didn't. I dreaded to alarm him.

He approved of this. "I'm glad to see that you put yer trust in the Lord, Melissa," getting up. I could see that he wanted to kneel down and pray, and Mrs. Andrews feared the same thing. She walked to the door and brought his tippet and great coat. He patted my head as he went out. "Keep off of Main Street unless you're in a buggy. And don't worry. Him and me will work out a scheme."

I was grateful, but I thought that I would rather trust God than the member of the council to arrange a beautiful way. I took a lamp and went up the stairs to my cold room while I fixed up for the Bon Ton dancing club, and I talked to Him as I dressed. In spite of my walking down Main Street, God and I have always been friendly. I know He understands perfectly about my staring at valises.

The party that night was lovely. The young man who was "rushing" me has a very good bicycle repair shop. There is a report that he once gave lessons in a roller skating rink in a large town, which makes him attractive. He had a way of curving around the corners as he waltzed that suggested it. I enjoyed the floating along with him and every one stopped to watch when we did some "figures." However, the mother of the girl who was entertaining the club stopped

us when she heard they were "fancy" figures. She said that it was not a nice word. I was quite worried to have done the wrong thing. I feared I should never get a "finish."

After the good ice cream and cake, I forgot about it, though, and when she asked me to recite some pieces I was glad to oblige her. One of the pieces was "The Joy of Being Alive," for I had cut it out and put it in my shell box for jewelry. I lifted up my head and talked to the ceiling so that I wouldn't have to see anybody in the room. I wanted to be very glad I was alive. The tears came into my eyes during the last verse, which is sad, and as my head was thrown back they rolled down my cheeks. Every one was much impressed but uncomfortable.

After I was through, a lady who was visiting the house came over to talk with me. She asked me why I didn't study elocution and Delsarte as a New Washington girl of the much older set was doing at present. Then I could teach in a private school. "That was my work before I was married," she explained.

"I don't know where to learn," I said.

"There is only one place, and that is Boston," was her answer.

At first I couldn't say anything, and she thought I was disinclined. But I was really making a speech. It was: "I am very much obliged, God."

There was more dancing before half past ten came, but I didn't leave the stranger's side. She told me of the school, yet it surprised me that she had so little to say of Boston. She had lived in Haverhill and went in and out as though it was all the world. The older New Washington girl, Jennie Daly, boards in Boston, however, and could give me addresses of cheap boarding places. "And when you have your work, one place is like another," she said.

That made an impression on me. The strength of it caused me to draw down my lips tightly as I had seen my mother do. Whenever I find myself like mother, remorse tweaks at my heart. I can't be like mother and father at the same time. He seems to be left out in the cold. I needn't have troubled over this, for the corners of my mouth soon turned up again. Even while the visitor was telling me of the excellence of the courses, I was far away from the school. I was crossing the Common, staring anywhere I pleased. I was looking at valises when I wanted to.

I was glad that I had to earn my living, glad that this school gave me an opportunity of earning it delightfully. But above all, was I glad that the chain of circumstances would make it necessary for me to go to Boston. I appeared to listen to her. I nodded when she spoke of "work" as though that was my only thought. But it wasn't. My life seemed to have just be-

gun. It was like a roll of clean white muslin on a shelf. I was taking it down as she spoke and was unrolling it the way the clerks do. Flop, flop, flop it hits the counter. I looked up into a face that I can't yet see. There was so much of the muslin and I wanted to be generous. I laughed aloud, and the visitor asked me why I did it. I said it was because I was so happy. But I really had said to the face I couldn't see: "How many yards, please?"

When I walked home with the believed-to-be roller skater he put his arm around me, as that is the way to walk home. There was snow in the wide street, and the branches of the big elms overhead were coated with ice. They glistened in the light of the arcs which hung in the center of the road at the end of every other block.

We could see couples from the club ahead of us, and when they reached the corners that were dark they walked more slowly. As all follow the same custom, pairs do not overtake each other as a rule. But that night I walked swiftly all the time, and we had to warn those ahead by going "Ooh-ooh!"

The roller skater didn't like my hurrying, and neither did the others. I couldn't blame them. In a way, they were at their work and shouldn't be disturbed. They would have to continue doing that, and changing partners, and rechanging until each girl found an arm that fitted her waist.

And then she would go on with him, for life. Only his arm would not be around her for fear they might be seen.

Yes, they were at work — finding out — for marriage was to be their business. But my business is to earn my living in a beautiful way and to get a polish, and to see Boston.

III

So much has happened! And there have been many talks. It has been mostly about money, and there are figures down the side of every New Washington *Banner* that has come into the house. The lady visitor was called in to advise with the council, and became very prominent in the town.

I am leaving to-morrow, although it is wash day and upsetting. I put out my hands a little to keep it off, then hug the thought up again. The lady visitor has done all the writing to the school. I am to take the two-years' course in one year and a half. At first the principal wrote that it was absolutely impossible, then he was told that there wasn't money enough otherwise, so he reconsidered.

I was pretty sick before that letter arrived. Everett, who came home at the beginning of the Christmas holidays, kept asking. "Have you heard, have you heard?" with his kind glass-of-water face all agitated like seltzer. Everett doesn't want me to go, and, though he struggled against it, he hoped the principal wouldn't take me. Everett isn't going back again.

While he has a nice cape overcoat he has not

changed greatly. I was glad to see him, and he has been taking me to all the farewell parties, completely cutting out the roller skater (so reported) but I was not as proud of him as though he were only here for his vacation. He has come home to go into the hardware store and I know when his cape overcoat gets old-fashioned he will be just the way he was when he went away.

I want to go on and on and on, and not end where I began. He says that the thing for a man to do is to find his niche, and he found where his was while down in Harvard wrestling with the Classics and the Romance tongues — it is among the spades and lawn mowers.

Once or twice he has hinted that there was room in his niche for both of us but I pretended not to understand. It might break a young man's spirit to be refused the first time he asked a girl to marry him. The second or third time he would forget. I have found that even the approach to a proposal of marriage is very solemn. I had always thought it would be gay, and provoke excitement.

To-night we went to church together. The young men and girls generally sit in the back rows unless the deacons can get hold of them and invite them to come forward. But last night he led me to his father's pew before I could stop him. It seemed like a sort of ceremony, and it was a long way down the aisle. His mother and father, in

good clothes, were there, and they moved down for us — crackling.

Everett seated himself and then stood up to take off his cape overcoat. I kept my coat on as I wasn't wearing my pale blue cashmere. I thought a good deal about my clothes during the service. Being poor makes you behave badly in church because you have to keep planning. Perhaps I shall not feel the necessity of nice things in Boston, since I have no friends there. In New Washington it is pretty hard sometimes. I re-trimmed a hat, although I tried not to, through the first of the long prayer. At last the minister spoke of "the young girl going out of our midst," and I choked up. I felt already alone and outside the circle of their "midst." Everett was much embarrassed.

Still, though I was on the outside, I was glad that the Austen pew did not feel especially sheltering. I have a belief, I can't form it, but it is in the back of my head. It is that I myself must construct any permanent barrier for protection. It will not be a shield as material as Austen hardware. It will be a garment of the imagination and I must weave it. I hold a picture of me running the shuttle back and forth on the hand loom, choosing my colors from skeins that are gay and gray. I can work for life on it, and it will grow stronger and stronger.

Many of the older people shook hands with me

when the service was over. It was in the *Banner* that I was going away. They clogged the aisles and every one was looking. I promised to write all of them all the time.

As usual the boys on the sidewalk waited in groups while the girls who were with their parents came down the steps. Then they lifted their hats in a surprised way as though they had not expected to see them, and fell in with the family. The father and mother went on immediately, as they knew what was expected of them, and the younger couple dropped behind. Sometimes a girl hasn't any one to walk home with her except merely her people and that is very humiliating. I haven't had a great deal in life, but I have always had someone to take me home.

Everett came in when we reached the house, as it was only nine. Mrs. Andrews had put ashes on the base burner and gone to bed. We turned up the lamp and had some apples. Conversation was not regular.

"Why do you go, Missy?" he asked.

"I must earn my living."

"Is that the reason?"

"I want to go, besides."

"I wish it was because you had to earn your living — and for no other reason."

"Why?"

"Because you could earn it here, yes, and more than your living."

It didn't sound like a lover, but it was. I offered him another apple, not asking him what he meant. He shook his head at the offer. "You don't suppose I could eat, do you? I can't finish the one I've got."

"I can't either," I said, giving it up regretfully.

"Then you must feel as I do."

I made no reply. My heart was beating, but I didn't feel as he did — only nervous. He got out of the patent rocker. It was the small one and stuck slightly. He walked over toward me and then stopped to look at the shades. They were down. But in that instant he lost confidence. He put his hands in his pockets and kicked at the stove. "I'm going into father's store, Missy, to keep the books."

"I think that's splendid, Everett."

"My grandmother left me some money, and next year, when I'm of age, I'm going to put it into the business, then I can be a partner. Father won't let me be a partner, of course, unless I put in money."

"Of course, at least, I suppose it couldn't be done."

"That wouldn't be business. But I'll be on a salary all this year."

"It will be hard to wait a year, though."

The red deepened in his round, reddish face. "You're smart, Missy. You're as smart as they make 'em." He pulled up a chair close to me

and creaked down. I pushed away a little, but he didn't notice that. His blue eyes were quite hard and keen. He seemed to have passed from something that was near his heart to something that was nearer.

"I've been thinking out a plan for you to stay here, Missy, where you belong — among your folks. I know you haven't much money, but suppose, instead of using it up, you put it in our business, right away. That would make you a silent partner. Then if I — if we — Missy" — he put out his hand, very perspiry.

I arose in a great hurry. I understood. If I became a shareholder and Everett married me right away, he would, through this marriage, become a partner without having to wait until he was twenty-one. I was too astonished to be annoyed. Everett had thought this out — the boy who couldn't get through college. He was fond of me, yet simple as was his nature, he was also shrewd. I recalled the words of my father: "What a queer lot we Yankees are!"

"I've nothing to do with my money, Everett; there are only a few hundreds, and what we get from room rentals pays the mortgage on this old house. Besides — I'm going to Boston."

Everett got up, too. The thrift had gone out of his face. It seemed to go away suddenly like a rash, the cause of which was inside of him, but

over which he had no control. We went back to boy and girl talk.

"I don't want you to go," he breathed awkwardly.

I was rather tired. "It was you who wanted me to go in the first place. It was you—" I lingered on the marvel of it—"yes, it was you who really stirred me up. *You, Everett!*"

He was pleased that he had influenced my life, so I went on: "I have you to thank for it all, and I do thank you." I put out my hand.

He took it. "If you ever need a friend," he muttered.

I was very much touched. He should have gone home then, but he didn't realize it—feel it. He stayed on and arranged to have me meet an acquaintance of his. He is a man of the world who lives in Cambridge. Everett met him in a café once after a football game, when the younger men were listening to the older ones talk. His manners were perfect. He found that he had some interest in the forests in this county and, at his request, Everett wrote to Mr. Austen for a report on them. He had told Everett when he came to his fashionable rooms with the report that if he could do him any favor in return, just to call upon him. The favor is that he is to call upon me. Finally Everett went home, taking an apple. One of the lodgers came in to get warm

before going up to bed, and that made the parting easier.

I rolled up the shades after the lamp was extinguished and looked out for a while. The houses of our neighborhood stand back in large yards. It is as though they wished to avoid the contamination of the public street. Yet each has a straight walk leading down to the gate, as straight as one's duty. The sidewalks by the gates are worn in a sort of half circle, for those who live in the houses turn always in one way, and go down to the town.

If one goes the other way, one will soon find no sidewalks, and only open country, although the road is the big highway, which, some say, leads to Boston. When I was little I would steal off until I reached the end of this pavement, then I would want to go farther but be afraid to step out into the big world. I would run back into the very heart of New Washington — in the "right" direction, which is the direction that every one took.

To-night I find that I still want to step off the pavement — yet I am still afraid.

IV.

I DIDN'T cry when I went away. At the last moment I thought I had forgotten my box of lunch. I didn't want to speak to any one about it, for it would have been too late anyway, but I kept worrying all the time they were saying, "Good-by, Missy; good-by, Melissa Robinson." Every one waited until the train pulled out and finally it grew hard to think of anything to say.

I was to sit in the day coach until eight at night, and then I was to take the sleeper. I saved a dollar and a half that way. Every time we curved around a hill I could see the Pullman and the dining car on ahead. They were very handsome and it gave me a pleasant feeling to have something rich to look forward to. I decided, then, if I always have a bow of promise before me, I shall be able to endure any present situation.

I've a great deal ahead of me, practically my whole life — from sixteen on, that is — and it must necessarily be full of beautiful occurrences. Mrs. Andrews says the things we want most we are sure to get. I expect some of the things I will get may surprise me, not knowing that I

wanted them until they arrived. I planned until supper time.

My lunch was in my valise after all. Every one was eating out of shoe boxes, so I didn't mind — but I was glad I wasn't in the Pullman. I had some cold chicken left and I wanted to give it away, but I was ashamed to. Besides, no one noticed me but a man in the seat across. He kept looking over and smiling. He had long pointed shoes — out in the aisle — and he changed his diamond ring from his right to his left hand, because it was on my side.

All the girls at home flirt with drummers, but I couldn't flirt with a man who has to ride in a common coach, even if I'm there myself.

I was afraid, but I wasn't afraid of him. I turned away, and pressed my head against the window pane to look out into the darkening snow fields. I tried to find out things about myself. What do I fear when a man notices me? Not him, for I can run away. Myself? Perhaps it is; because the something in me that makes them stare is the something in me that makes me afraid. I don't like this part of me, and yet I am born with it just as I am born with ten toes. I don't believe I can any more run away from it than I can run away from my ten toes either.

I grew a little nervous sitting alone in a car with a part of me that I can't get away from. There seemed to be a great deal of space about

me. I had the wish that I could be hedged around somehow. "In the fold" kept coming to my mind. I thought of the garment I must weave for my protection. I must be about it.

I was glad when I could take my valise and go into the sleeper. The man with the diamond ring was going to sit up. All the berths were ready and the porter took me to mine. I knew how to get into these beds, for when my father went to Boston in the Pullman, he told me of it. I couldn't remember what he had done about giving the tip to the porter, though, whether it was at the beginning or the end of the trip. Mrs. Andrews heard that if you give him money the minute you start you get much better attention. All this week she has been collecting odd change for the porter, and she put it in a separate place in my purse. I decided to give it to him before I went to bed. And I did. There was twenty-eight cents. He seemed astonished when I poured it into his hand and didn't even thank me.

I worried more over its being too little than over its being too much, although Mrs. Andrews said it was princely, and he shouldn't really receive anything. I expect I am poorer than he is, for I must count every penny, Mrs. Andrews says.

It was afternoon when we reached Boston the next day, for we were blocked by snow. I had had breakfast in the dining car (and had given the waiter a ten cent tip), but that was all I had

eaten and I was hungry. People were being met by people at the depot, and I thought for a moment I was going to be met, too, for a tall fair man was walking up and down the platform, eyeing all of us. He looked like the photograph I've seen of Everett's friend to whom I have the letter. But, of course, I didn't speak, for he was the kind of man who wouldn't encourage such a thing unless he knew you. Only it would have been pleasant to have been met.

I walked out of the station by myself. I remembered what Jennie Daly wrote. She is a senior at the school where I am going, and knows Boston life thoroughly. I refused to listen to the hack drivers on the station side of the street who charge fifty cents, but went across to the herdies, and took one as far as the bridge on Columbus Avenue. "Stop at the bridge," I said firmly. I wanted him to think I understood Boston. He groaned horribly, for it is only a quarter to that point, and fifty cents to go farther. I gave him a ten cent tip, though, which surprised him.

The boarding house is just a few steps beyond this bridge, and yet I came very near not reaching it. I mean it seemed that way for a moment. The trains were rushing under the roadway — for it is really a viaduct — and as I was crossing over, one of them came thundering along in the darkness under me, and something that was a part of myself screamed: "Throw yourself over!"

It was perfectly natural for the moment. I believe I could have done it as easily as not. But it was only for that instant. Life welled up around me, so sweet and beautiful, and I crossed the bridge.

V

JENNIE DALY doesn't live in my boarding house, but she takes her meals there. You go in by the basement door to the dining-room. There is a sign in the window :

" 21 Meal Tickets: Ladies \$3.50, Gents \$4.00."

Miss Croakes sits at a sort of desk in the hall and punches out the meals. She wears a white knitted cape over her shoulders. It was washed once and is pulled into holes. She is little and seems to make the most of it, for I think she would rather be young than not. Her hair is a frizzed red, and her cheeks stick out from her wrinkles in lumps. She paints these lumps and they look like winter apples in ugly surroundings. She is hard worked, and so is her mother, an old lady, all gray, who stays at the dumb waiter calling down to the cook in a sort of whispered rage.

When I first entered they were having supper — dinner, I should say. I went in and sat with Jennie and her roommate, whose name is Theodora King. Jennie is tall and thin, and she must have looked like an old maid before she was born.

Her red flannels show at the wrist, but you feel at once that it would not be the thing to tell her. I would call her stiff, but she calls it repose.

You can't say the same of Theodora. Her hair and eyes are wild, and she is never still a minute. Some young students from the technology sit next to us; I would think them very stylish at home, but they aren't very polite, as they make fun of the food with Theodora. At the table on the right is an old, old lady, quite by herself. The night I came she asked for a second helping of beef, and Miss Croakes came to her table to say that she would have to punch her ticket twice as beef was very high. The old lady said, of course, she understood that. Her cheeks grew very pink, and she shook, but when the second helping came she decided that she wasn't hungry, which wasn't true, as she ate all of her rice pudding.

Mrs. Croakes has two houses. My room is not in the one that has the dining-room and the parlor. It's next door, but there is only a railing a foot high separating the two stoops, and one can climb over, if it's not too icy, without much trouble.

I am sorry not to be in the house with the parlor, for if Everett's friend calls it will be awkward getting over in my pale blue cashmere.

Jennie's house has no parlor at all. She says she has grown accustomed to doing without.

I wonder if we can grow used to anything in time!

My room is on the first floor because there isn't any cheaper one vacant. You get an idea that it is going to be warm when you enter, then you find it rather clammy after a little while. The halls aren't heated at all, and such dreary people go in and out — all, that is, but the young South American student who has the room back of me. He plays on the guitar, and his friends come in to sing from the operas that are in town. The girls say Miss Croakes is in love with him. To be sure he gets a great deal of meat, and she always brightens up when he enters, and hurriedly slips off the crocheted shawl — for she wears a plaid silk waist underneath. At the moment she looks almost pretty. When love has that power, why do we laugh at it? I don't. I'm as scared as I can be of it. But I shall work hard and it may not come my way.

I wanted to wear my best clothes the first day at school, but I only allowed myself my hat with the rose bobbing up. Then I had to take it off, so of course it was wasted. I met the president and he said, "Ah! warm gold, like the first day of summer!" That was not my idea of a thing to say — especially in Boston. But he was elderly and kind, and talked over my future with me. It made me quite solemn to think I was all future and no past whatever.

When it came my time to read I was very frightened. Since I was to cover all the junior work in a half year, I felt that the students would not be on my side exactly. We read around the class in the order of our sitting. As the girl who was fifth from me was reading, I was praying, "O Lord, let me do my best," but by the time the one next to me had commenced I had changed my plea to "O Lord, have it recess, please, have it recess."

Nothing happened, however, and I must have done quite well, for there was a little stirring among them. Later, we had calisthenics, posing, Delsarte and dancing. The teacher of calisthenics is the thinnest woman I have ever seen. Someone asked her why she didn't develop herself, and she flushed crimson. She said she hadn't the time.

I heard the instructors talking me over.

"Oh, she'll get on," one said; she seemed almost angry.

"Why? She isn't so pretty, and a middle-sized giant could crush her with his thumb and forefinger."

"No, but don't you feel it? Something exudes from her. A power that is strength and weakness at once."

"Dear me, Caroline, that doesn't sound decent!"

They all laughed.

Jennie has pointed out to me that if we do without our luncheon at Mrs. Croakes', which amounts to about seventeen cents, we can get a cup of bouillon on the way home for five cents, and make two weeks' meal tickets answer for three. She knows all the drug stores where they serve soda crackers free, and she says when the fair begins at Mechanics' Hall one can easily get a whole lunch out of the pure food samples.

Jennie appears to like me, but when I hold onto her she shakes me off. However, she says her present roommate, Theodora, has too broad views of life to suit her; and, more than that, Theodora wants to room with Gracia just as soon as the young man Gracia is going to marry leaves for Florida. She is the girl who goes out to stay with her people almost every night, so it gives Theodora a chance to be alone, although why she has to wait until the young man goes to Florida is more than I can understand. But that doesn't make any difference to me. If I can room with Jennie so that my expenses will be lessened, I shall ask no questions. I wonder if Jennie ever takes off her red flannels.

This has been a good day. It was pleasant under foot and I could walk both ways; also, owing to being full of thoughts, I didn't miss my luncheon — very much. My instructor of dancing is a foreigner, very alive, and something goes out from ourselves, each to the other, a sort of

throb of understanding, when we meet. To-day I stayed late to practice some steps with her.

"You are studying to teach also?" she asked me.

"Like the others," I told her.

"That will be a waste; you would make a fine dancer. Specialize in that and some day you will make a name for yourself."

I looked at her and stammered: "On the stage?"

"Surely, we are arriving at the age of dancing. You have everything on your side: grace, youth, good looks, and that quality which makes men turn around to see if you are looking too."

"But I am not," I cried.

"Then you have a good head. Another quality much needed for the theater."

"But not a dancer on the stage!" I again protested.

"Where else?" she smiled. She was being kind she thought.

I suddenly felt very small, and in the center of a great wind-swept space with thousands of eyes upon me. I was alone, unprotected, all my defenses gone. I could see in contrast a small cell with prison bars, and they were welcome. For the moment I envied nuns who were cloistered and need exercise no strength of their own to be so shut in.

"I shall never be a public dancer," I cried hotly.

"Who are you to flout the talent that is given you?"

I feared that I was going to lose her interest and sympathy. "But I'll study hard, and stick to dancing, and I'll create beautiful figures for happy girls to learn in school."

She put kind hands on my shoulders. "Why don't you want to let the world see you?"

"I'm afraid," I confessed, "of the lights, the music, the — I don't know what."

She was silent, looking out of the window down into Tremont Street. The cars were clanging, the snow shovelers shouting, the city way was blocked with life, but always fighting to get on. After a little intent listening the noise resolved itself into one universal sound, and that sound into a regular beat which kept time with my heart. I spoke of it.

"All life has rhythm," she answered, "just as your soul and body have. Don't think you can escape from the beat of your pulses by crawling into a corner."

VI

COLUMBUS AVENUE is not so impressive when one becomes accustomed to rows of houses all over a city. It is like the rooms at Mrs. Croakes'. At first one thinks, "This is very handsome," and then one sees that nothing matches, and the yellow oak furniture is very cheap, and squeaks.

People are like that; we are all disappointments to each other. I no longer greatly value Mrs. Croakes, and she dislikes me; also the young South American hates me and Miss Croakes now hates the South American. And I am to blame for it all — or perhaps it is the ugly furniture which sends me over to Jennie to study every time she asks me. That brings me home late and the last time I came back after nine I heard a voice — only it was a woman — talking in the room of the South American. Not that that made any difference, for I was glad he had gone, and that someone with whom I might be friendly had taken his place.

I went over to Mrs. Croakes' parlor to pay my weekly bill. Mrs. Croakes didn't let me in the room at first. There was a slamming sound and when Miss Croakes opened the door a crack, the

sofa was being pushed back where I had always seen it. I believe that the sofa is their bed at night. I don't suppose there is a real parlor in this whole boarding-house district.

As I went out, I told them that I was glad a lady had taken the room back of me, and then, almost before I had finished, Mrs. Croakes said to her daughter, "Go over there and see to it." But Miss Croakes was already over there. She went into my room and crouched down with her ear against the connecting door. The girl spoke again — but the South American's voice answered her. I had made an error. I had told on someone. I was very miserable, but I was not as unhappy as the landlady's daughter. When she arose, the red apples on her cheeks stuck out so far from her face that I could have picked them.

"The dirty dog," she said; "he'll go to-morrow." She looked sick and I remembered that she loved the young man. "And after all that meat," she added as she left.

Toward morning the girl passed my door going out. She wore a rusty silk petticoat. The South American went into the hallway with her. He said he was expecting a check from home. I crept to the window and watched her go up the street. The wind was blowing and it was fearfully cold. I wanted to go back to bed, but I felt that I shouldn't as long as the girl stayed out, and she was still walking about. I pretended that it

was a sort of penance for telling on her. After a while I grew so numb that I became confused. I had an idea that the girl and I were one. It was terrible. We were suffering great pain in our feet. I must have dozed a bit, for I found myself moving about in a dance to keep warm, and it came to me, in a great glow, that the girl and I could never be one, for I could always earn my living by my work. When I looked again she was gone, and I went to bed and to sleep.

VII

I HAVE met Everett's friend. He has a name, of course. It is Van Wyck Ruyne, and the last is pronounced like Rhine.

He was waiting in the parlor when I came home from school late, so I didn't have time to put on my pale blue cashmere. I thought of it all the time I was climbing the railing between the stoops. He was the man I had seen at the station, and that is the first thing I said to him. He replied that Everett had wired for him to try to meet me — that I would wear a bobbing rose in my hat. I told him that was my best hat, and naturally was in my trunk. He said, "Of course, naturally."

All this time we were standing in the center of the room, but I knew in a minute I must ask him to sit down. Both Mrs. Croakes and her daughter were present, and they didn't move. I realized that it was truly the bedroom and that I had no right there. Mr. Ruyne had been talking to them, not to be kind, I fear, but to be amused. Miss Croakes had been in a gale of tittering until I came in, then she looked scornful. The South

American had been with them a long while, and I suppose it is hard to make both ends meet.

After a dreadful pause, Mr. Ruyné said, "Do we go over to your rooms?" I looked at Mrs. Croakes. I was expecting her to protest, but she went on darning tablecloths. She didn't care. Nobody cared. Anyway, I was glad he thought I had "rooms." The bed folds up.

We climbed across. Nothing seemed to disconcert him, but then he is a bohemian. He lives in Cambridge just now because he wants to be near an aged aunt ("but not too near") who is rich and thinks of dying.

He says things in a sort of off-hand way — nothing seems of much consequence. I tried to act that way, too, since it must be the correct thing, but I grew rather excited when he told me that he had lived in Paris. I have never known any one but Lucy Beck who has ever been to Paris.

"Do you like French?" I asked, wishing to appear cultured. He answered me in that tongue, so I don't know yet whether he likes French or not.

I felt countrified, but I kept on admiring him. He is all the things you read about. He is very good looking — no, he is not. There is a coarseness about him, but that must be what I want. Twice as I looked at him the something that told me to throw myself over the bridge said: "He is

a brute." Then I looked again and saw how well he carried himself, and how easily his clothes hung, without any drummer affectations, and how softly kind he was when he was kind at all, and that seemed a silly thing to pop into my head. His eyes are tired and hidden by heavy lids, his brow and nose are splendid. He wears a moustache to hide his mouth. At least I suppose that is the reason, for it is rather heavier than those of the men one sees on Beacon Street. His lips are full and red and his teeth large and heavy. I see that this is no description of him, but he is big, and strong, and polished, and all of the things I am not, so of course I like him.

I wanted to do my share and make myself entertaining, and I knew neither the school nor New Washington, where I come from, would interest him, so I finally told him a little about the South American. I felt myself growing red, but I forced myself to do it so that I could hold his attention. I thought that if he would tell me that I had no right to be in the house with the South American that I would feel more protected in the future, even though he was way over in Cambridge. But he only looked a little bored and said: "You're not a poor sport, I hope."

That is no way to talk to a girl who is just from a little town, and I knew it, still I was quite crushed, and felt that I would never become a bohemian. He always followed up something that

made me unhappy by something that made me feel I was very important. I suppose that is what Theodora would call his "line of attack."

"You are an awfully little scrap of a girl for such a big room," he said as he got up to go. I explained that I was to have a smaller and cheaper one just as soon as it was empty — that they were putting out a lady this week. Then he laughed a great deal for the first time.

"And if you stay on absorbing all this," he continued rather oracularly, "what will Everett say when he marries you?"

Marrying Everett seemed even more absurd after my three weeks here. Already I had found it hard to write him, for I knew that he wouldn't care for the things I cared for in Boston. I replied that I had no thought of marrying Everett. He put out his hand.

"Right O! we'll have some good times then, little Miss Robinson." And he went out the door without saying good-by. It was like a play.

VIII

I THOUGHT the good times would begin the next day, but three weeks went by before I saw him again. Some days Boston did not seem as beautiful as I had expected.

I had had a boil on my shoulder and it had almost healed. Having the boil was very dismal. I bought a little alcohol stove and made poultices for it, and I didn't have a doctor, so it had to take care of itself.

On the day it was at its worst someone in the gymnasium dropped a dumb-bell on my shoulder which made me shriek, then all the girls clustered around me and asked why I hadn't told them about it. The instructor said I should have remained at home. I couldn't tell them that I would rather suffer with it than stay in my large cold room. All of a sudden I began to cry. They thought it was on account of the boil, but it was really on account of my large room, and, perhaps, because the good times were not beginning.

The day after the boil was better I moved upstairs into a small hall room. The lady who had occupied it had said it was "not true," and had refused to leave at first. I heard her saying it all

down the hall to Miss Croakes. So as she had paid her rent in advance she insisted upon living it out. Miss Croakes said there is always something the matter with them when they want to pay in advance, "and if she hadn't 'a' needed the money —"

It is a very little room, indeed, heated by the hall, which means that it isn't heated at all. "How warm it is!" Miss Croakes always says when she sees me studying with my door open and my coat over my shoulders. I have to go into the bathroom to practice my dance steps, and then I strike the tub.

I didn't tell any one, but the very first night I could hear a woman moaning in the big room next to mine. Of late when something happens I remind myself that this is none of my affair. But she moaned the next night and then I asked the chambermaid. She said someone was awful sick there, and Miss Croakes was that cross about it.

The third day I heard the woman say that they had brought her no food. I stood up then with my ear to the door and boldly listened. The chambermaid said she was sorry and would go herself, and after she had gone downstairs, I just went in to see what I could do.

Her face was very white, and the rings around her eyes looked like the kind the clowns paint on. Her nightgown was covered with cheap lace, but the ribbons were not run in, and it was soiled. I

had carried in my bottle of beef, wine and iron tonic by way of introducing myself. I wanted to give her some, but she wrung her hands feebly and cried. I felt foolish, and saw that she didn't need me or want me. She didn't notice when I went out.

No one came to see her but the doctor. He was a stumpy, dirty-looking man with an unkempt beard, and puffy about the eyes. He had a hospital near here, the chambermaid said. Late that night, as I was lying with my transom open, to get a circulation of air, I heard Mrs. Croakes talking to him.

She said his patient must go, that he had no right to bring her into a decent house which had kept its good name and which wouldn't have indiscreet women dying in it. She threatened to make trouble for him.

He said: "You women are hard on each other."

"Women, is it?" she snorted in reply. "I don't think it was a woman who put her in your filthy care."

He calmed down then, and said he would wire again, but he believed the man was out of the country. He didn't suppose Mrs. Croakes would care to have her go until the rent was paid. She said "Oh, no!" hastily.

The next day as I was coming home, he and a man were helping the girl down the steps into a

carriage. Her face was drawn with pain but she kept smiling up at the man. They had not dressed her completely, although she had managed to tie a bit of bright ribbon around her throat.

Now Mrs. Croakes is disinfecting the room with an ill-smelling insecticide, and soon someone else will be moving in. I looked over my few dresses, planning what I should wear if I saw Mr. Ruyme more than once — if I ever saw him again, I should say. I was so hungry for something pleasant to happen that I found myself envying the sick woman whom I had seen looking up into the face of the man. My dresses are like her bright ribbon, but I have no one to wear them for.

IX

A FEW days afterward Jennie and I took a long walk up Beacon Street. Whenever I cross the viaduct leading over to the Back Bay I seem to breathe purer air. Jennie says the air is just as good in Columbus Avenue, if not better, but that isn't what I mean. We admired the early spring flowers in some of the windows. The plate glass is so clear that we can see grate fires in the rear room — it is very homelike. All of the women drag their dresses, and all the men wear button-hole bouquets. A violet dropped from one man's bunch, and I hid it in my purse quickly. I was afraid he might see me and laugh. I had never had a violet in February before.

Another man did notice me. He jabbed his companion in the side and said, "Cophetua, wake up!"

Jennie decided that it was rather a compliment than an insult, as I was not supposed to hear. But I felt very shabby and like a beggar maiden. If a man asked me to go into Hollander's and buy everything I needed, I wonder would I go? I decided that I wouldn't, but it must be sweet to have someone you like buy you things.

It was a good day for me, though a shabby one. In the first place, I arranged definitely to go to Jennie's the following week, and in the second place, which is really the *first*, but not in order, Mr. Ruyne called shortly after I reached home. It was such luck, for I could just as easily have missed him. One so often misses what one wants very much by walking a block too far.

I felt unhappy about the hall bedroom, but I explained that I was leaving shortly. He had to sit on the bed, which is a divan — sort of. I expected him to tell me why it had been three weeks since I had seen him, but he didn't. He never says what I think he is going to, and what I had planned to say myself I can never get in. Nor does he care for what I think he is going to care for. He is disinterested in my advancement at school, but was pleased when he heard that the man on Beacon Street had referred to King Cophetua and the beautiful beggar girl.

"By gad, he's right," he affirmed. If I looked long enough at his teeth I shouldn't like him so much.

I was greatly mortified when, in getting my handkerchief, the violet fell out of my purse, but it pleased him. He drew his hand over my cheek. "Child," he murmured. I loved it, although I knew that I shouldn't.

And that isn't all of the day — in the evening we went to the theater! The seats were in the

main floor, too. He said he was dining with some friends, but he would call for me at eight, and not to dress.

I had to ask him more about that: would pale blue cashmere do?

"Anything at all," he answered.

"I mean, will it be too dressy?"

"Oh, that!" He laughed all the way down the stairs.

When we reached the theater I saw that the pale blue cashmere was nothing — nothing.

It was an opera. There is music that one never forgets, and it isn't at all on account of the beauty of it, but on account of the person you are with. The prima donna sang a song about a nightingale that was so lovely I wanted to die for someone. I looked at Mr. Ruyné in the darkness. His eyelids were heavy and tired, but his eyes were charming. They didn't get black at night as most eyes do, but stayed a pale bored gray. He smiled back at me out of the darkness — just an eye smile — and pressed my arm with his fingers.

My heart grew small, then large again. I decided that I could die for him. At that, in fancy, my dancing marched up and stood beside him. "How about me — what will you do for me?" it asked.

"I shall live for you," I consoled.

But my dancing went: "Humph!"

"The same thing that makes me live for you makes me die for this man," I went on; "it's all heart beats — rhythm. My instructor said so. If I didn't have them I couldn't dance, so then where would you be?"

My dancing went away but it was sad, like one "cut out."

When the opera was over we went through a narrow street full of people rushing to trains. The snow was deep and the carriages were all mixed up. No one drives in surreys here — they all use hacks.

I was wondering if anything pleasanter could happen, when Mr. Ruyne said: "Now shall we go to a restaurant and have a respectable and dull time eating with a few hundred others, or shall we take a private room, and have a nice little supper by ourselves — which?"

I didn't answer.

"Well, Miss Melissa Robinson, which?"

"I shall have to walk along for a little while and think it over," I replied.

"It's not as important as that."

"Is it wrong to eat in a private room?"

"Not wrong, but unconventional."

"Something tells me that it is wrong."

"Oh, very well, if you know more about it than I do."

He looked bored and I had a spasm of fear. "I suppose a student doesn't have to be conventional, does she?" I asked.

He cleared up. "That's just it," he approved.

I felt flushed with the excitement of becoming a bohemian. We went into a nice-looking hotel. The big doors closed behind us with a boom. Everything was very decorous and the room was so plain that I could have cried — just a little round table, and a few chairs, with a picture on the wall of hounds dragging down a doe.

I had a hard time with the food. Mr. Ruyme spoke French to the waiter, so I didn't know what we were going to have, but it was only roasted oysters after all, and a "little bottle," as he called it. It sparkled and was a lovely yellow. I thought it was champagne, which I had never seen.

I tasted the oysters, but I am not accustomed to highly seasoned cooking and the pepper burned me terribly. I seized the long-stemmed bubbling glass and hastily drank from it. The fumes went right into my nose. Tears streamed from my eyes. The waiter handed me a glass of water. Mr. Ruyme said to eat a little bread. He was awfully kind. I was hot to my toes with shame. "Perhaps you don't like wine," he said.

I was disappointed. "Oh, is this wine!" I cried. "I thought it was champagne."

The waiter went out quickly. He always knocked twice before he came in, until Mr. Ruyme spoke to him very sharply in French, and after that he came in without knocking.

As soon as I had learned to sip the wine slowly it didn't bother me much, but all of a sudden I grew a little dizzy, and I didn't touch any more. I hummed the nightingale song from the opera. Mr. Ruyme said the idea was from an old story in the Decameron, that he would show me the volume when I came out to see his "comfy rooms," that is, the outside of it. "You haven't read the Decameron, have you?" he asked.

I told him I had never seen a copy, but I had heard of it. Lucy Beck's brother had the book in his washstand drawer until his mother found it. To tell the truth, I was surprised that Mr. Ruyme would speak of a book one must hide in the washstand drawer.

"Don't read it," he quite begged me. "Keep wonderful — just as you are."

He put his hand over mine as it rested on the table. I drew it away with the greatest effort, not that he was preventing me, but that something in me was wanting it to stay there. A wave of despair swept over me — I must be always fighting the happiest part of me and even after I fight, it generally wins. Tears came into my eyes. It was somehow, very easy to cry.

"What's the matter?" he coaxed.

"I can't stay just as I am — no one can — I must go on and learn life, and all its ways."

"Then let me be one of your teachers —" he was very gentle — "don't let knowledge come to you unbeautifully."

I was quite grateful, and felt sheltered all the way home. "In the fold" came to my mind again. It was my original idea to learn beautifully.

The next day, early, he sent me a whole bunch of sweet-smelling violets. I wore them to school and divided some of them among the girls. It was just like giving out beautiful bits of happy knowledge.

X

It is so splendid at Jennie's — my home now. The house is small, and the minute the front door is opened the warmth comes out to greet you. Mrs. Short emerges from her sitting-room as we go in and says: "Well, young ladies, what did you learn to-day?"

She is fat and comfortable-looking, with white hair which she said turned white from fright, and eyes of a snappy brown. She wears clean print wrappers always. If the edges get dirty, she scolds, because then she says the house is dirty. One has the feeling that she is very executive. I like her, but I shouldn't like to displease her, or not pay my rent.

When I told Mrs. Croakes that I was giving up my room and would come only for my meals, her poor mouth quivered and twisted. "I shall never have a woman in my house again," was her only comment, and I felt like those others who had been asked to move. I gave her an extra week's rent, pretending that it was the custom, and I wanted to ask her to have the South American back, but I didn't dare.

Mrs. Short prospers, yet she has all women in

her house — except Jimmy. He is a "coach," and an old friend of the family, I am told. He takes his meals with her down in the clean kitchen. Sarah is the cook, but Mrs. Short does up the rooms herself.

I told Theodora a little about the various troubles at Mrs. Croakes', and she said it can't be helped in this neighborhood. Mrs. Croakes is poor because she struggles for respectability, and the others don't. When I pointed out Mrs. Short's comfortable house to her to prove her wrong, she sang a scale: "la, la, la, la!" which was perplexing, only she explained afterwards that Mrs. Short had an income and kept lodgers for the sake of company.

I couldn't talk to Jennie freely, but I once asked her if she didn't think it was bad for us, two girls from New Washington, to be in this neighborhood. She grew very impatient. She said we can't have everything for six dollars a week, and nothing will hurt us if we don't let it. I looked at her — so untouched by conditions around her. Nothing will hurt Jennie, I know. She didn't tell what she had seen when she went home last summer, she reminded me, and of course I shan't say a word to Mrs. Andrews. It will be impossible to make her understand why I didn't go to the police and tell them all about Columbus Avenue. And what amazes me most of all, after my amazement over a girl from New

Washington being so curiously surrounded, is my acceptance of the surroundings as part of the day's work, like brushing my teeth and taking breathing exercises. Breathing exercises? I wonder if this new life is expansion!

Our room is the first flight front. The bed folds up and has a beveled mirror in it. There is a screen around the washstand, and a long low dresser with gas jets on either side. We don't have to use the cold, hard light of the chandelier in the center. There is a soft couch with a roll at one end, and a big woolly chair is in the bow window. One of the arms of the chair is quite smashed down from other lodgers in days gone by having sat on it. I suppose there was someone in the chair, too. At times I sit on the arm also, and pretend I am talking to a person inside. My arm is over the back. It is very intimate.

I watch from the window all the time when I am not studying. At dusk it is beautiful if I look up toward Dartmouth Street. Men and women are slipping in and out of my vision, not knowing that I am using them to make a series of street pictures; rich students have their little dogs out, and there is a great deal of striking of matches to light their pipes. The blue sulphur spurts up and is gone. The lamplighter hurries along, and the snow becomes yellow in circles around the lamp-post, instead of purple. Then

my event follows! I call it *my* event because Jennie sees nothing in it, and I see so much. First the glass ball of many colors which surmounts the pole in front of the gaudy drug store begins to revolve, and as it does so, the lights creep into it one by one. When it is all ablaze it goes faster and faster, throwing the rich shades prodigally about, just like the world revolving on its axis, and scattering lovely color into our lives.

A ruby beam strikes my breast every night. I call it Mr. Ruyme.

XI

I HAVE something to say, but it is going to be difficult. I must be very honest, and tell it straight. There is no use lying to myself.

The day began with excitement. On Fridays at the school we have a recital, and the public is invited. Strange kind of old ladies come — the ones we always see at church fairs when there is no admission.

Yesterday was my first appearance. I woke up in the morning with a terrible weight on my breast. I didn't know what it was at first, but after a moment I remembered that I was to recite and dance before people. I felt small and wind-swept again. I decided that I would think of Mr. Ruyme while I danced and then I should be sheltered.

As I waited for my turn I wondered why I should be afraid to get up before such ordinary creatures like myself when I didn't fear to sit among them. There was only a difference of a few feet between our little stage in the lecture room and the main floor where I was so comfortable, yet it was all the difference between terror and tranquillity.

I began to pray to God to have something happen to prevent my going on. I didn't care if it was an earthquake and hundreds of people were killed. As usual, He paid no attention to me. When my name was called I said to myself: "Be eccentric — run!" But all the time I was walking toward the stage.

First I recited a verse, and then the accompanist played on the piano and I danced. I was Pan and a young shepherdess. While I was repeating the first verse I was thinking of Mr. Ruyme. It was very strange how I could do both things at once, and when I began to dance I concentrated on him. I was sure he would help me if God could not.

Perhaps I would have been even worse without his help. Once I was so full of him that I made a misstep. I was terribly frightened and looked right out at the audience to see if they had noticed. They must have, for when I looked, they laughed and applauded sympathetically. Someone said: "She's such a baby!"

I went on and my hair fell down, making them laugh again. I swung to his name: "1, 2, 3, I-love-you; 1, 2, 3, help-me-through; 1, 2, 3, Van-Van-Van; 1, 2, 3, yes-you-can."

I caught a glimpse of the ballet mistress and she wasn't a bit pleased, even though the others liked me. I knew she was right — I didn't like myself — but it annoyed me that I didn't deceive

her. It occurred to me that I could cover up my bad dancing very successfully, since the audience didn't seem to mind just my smiling at them and shaking my hair around my eyes.

I did this — although it was cheating — and I knew it. Once I wondered if I would do better by concentrating more on what I was doing and less on Van, but it was so easy to think of him, and to win people just by smiling at them when I made mistakes, that I decided to keep on that way — and avoid the black looks of the instructor.

They were still applauding when I left the room. An attendant had said someone wanted to see me in the hall, and forgetting all about my hair in my excitement I walked out. Mr. Ruyne was there. He stared at me. "You beauty!" he whispered.

I put my hand up to my hair. It is very long, sorrel — I call it — in color, and curls when the air is damp, but is horrid on other days. I was so glad to see him that I didn't notice that they were calling for me until he told me to go back to the room and make a bow. I could see that he was pleased.

He hadn't seen me dance, though. He had come up just for a lark, and to ask me to lunch with him. When the girls streamed out I pretended to talk with him quite easily, as though he belonged to me. Once I put my fingers on his coat sleeve, but he was very formal: "Careful,

little girl," he murmured. He always makes me the offender, somehow or other.

When we reached the street, he hesitated a moment and then turned me toward the Gardens. I swayed whichever way he touched my arm, just as music sways me in the dance. It was delightful.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

I didn't care. "I've had my hour, now you have yours," I answered.

Then we took the red Cambridge car and rode a long time. He knew some of the students who were going out, too. Had Mr. Ruyme been any one else but himself I could have thought he was rather lordly toward me before them, just as I had tried to be toward him before the girls.

The boys would have attracted me enormously six weeks ago, and they would set New Washington afire still, but now they seemed to be too young to bother with. One of them dropped his books, and then his spectacles, and then his books again, as he was picking up his glasses. I laughed out loud at that, and was rather apologetic afterward.

"I don't ever seem to grow up," I said to Mr. Ruyme.

"How old are you?"

"I'm almost seventeen."

"And you expect to be a teacher of calisthenics, and such arts, in a private school?"

"I'm going to be."

"You'll never get a job. All those other students at your place are a great deal older. Why didn't you wait?" He seemed almost irritable.

"I couldn't wait; my money would have been all used up. I'm the youngest there, I admit, but you must remember I shall have another year. Then I'll be eighteen when I finish."

"Bully! We'll have all next winter together, and we shall be as close as close, shan't we, Miss Melissa Robinson?"

I thought I should suffocate with happiness. I had been wondering what if the aunt died.

The luncheon was at Mr. Ruyme's rooms. I didn't know it until we got there, and then, right at the door, I realized. I looked at him: "It's all right, I suppose?" I was afraid to say it, yet I had to.

He grew very cold and bored. "I'm taking you," he replied.

I pretended I was in terror of his Mrs. Croakes. I made it a sort of mock terror.

"Go right upstairs," he answered, "and pay no attention to any one."

It was a large house made up of small apartments. I could see the names of men on the door plates all along the corridor. One man was coming our way, but Mr. Ruyme stepped in between us as we were meeting and blocked his vision. I don't think the man looked, anyway. He

said: "Hello, Ruyne," rather shortly, I thought. One side of me was indignant and ashamed at being in a position to be hidden, but the other side was loving the secretiveness and the intimacy of the adventure.

The rooms were lovely. A grate fire burning, books around the walls, and chairs made to sit in. A piano was in one corner covered with a beautiful piece of embroidery. It was really an old coat. On the top were solid silver picture frames containing the most beautiful women I have ever seen in my life. Some were inscribed to "Van" or "Vanny," and other coldly correct ones were simply to "Mr. Ruyne, in memory of a pleasant evening."

I had on a dark blue sailor suit open at the throat, an old ulster over it, and, thank Heaven, my hat with the bobbing rose. But in spite of it, I realized that competition was too strong. I simply buried my face in the embroidered coat, and hid there — a foolish ostrich — praying never to come out.

Mr. Ruyne, who knows all that I think, came over and pulled me away. "You dear silly," he said, seesawing me along and getting me out of my coat, "don't you ever look in the mirror?"

I kept up a despairing little wail that made him laugh. It was all so delicious that as soon as I was out of my wraps I ran to the piano and buried my face again. But this time he said,

"No, no, I'm not going to pull you out of that pose again."

Then I was embarrassed.

A Japanese servant laid a piece of lace and linen upon the center table and put down a quaint silver service. I could hardly talk for staring at him at first. He was very polite and when he called me "Missy" I was obliged to tuck a smile into my napkin.

"Why?" queried Mr. Ruyne. We had started the lunch and he was opposite.

I told him, when the Japanese went out of the room, that, while Melissa is my real name, they all say "Missy" at home. So the polite servant was really calling me by my first name.

"Missy!" repeated Mr. Ruyne. "I should like to say it very often. How would you like the sound of Van?"

It was quite natural for him to call me "Missy" but it seemed impossible for me ever to call him "Van," although when you know a young man six weeks in New Washington, it is affected to do anything else.

He smiled every time I tried. "You'll do better some day," he said. I trembled a little but I liked the possibility.

It was a wonderful luncheon, although I don't remember what we had to eat. I didn't think the day would ever come when I would forget that someone was waiting on the table. At home you

can always hear them, and if the girl has on a cap and apron you keep staring at them. Mr. Ruyne spoke and acted as though a servant was not in the room at all.

Once, when I dropped my napkin, he came over to my side and picked it up himself, closing my fingers over the damask as one treats a baby, and kissing them as he did so. I had never had my hand kissed before, and I didn't know whether to curve it or straighten it out. As I had to hold on to the napkin it stayed curved, which was the right thing under the circumstances, I believe.

I didn't feel uneasy about this occurrence, for queens are always receiving such courtesies. But if it makes them as sick with happiness as it did me, they must be worn out with joy. I couldn't keep my feet still and three times I struck Mr. Ruyne, as the table was little. The first time he asked my pardon, the second he said: "Why, Missy, how naughty!" which made me flush as I laughed. But the last time he caught the offender between his two feet, and held it so.

There wasn't a break in his voice as he continued the story he was telling. But I could neither speak nor eat. I was afraid the Japanese could hear me breathing. Twice he offered me fruit but I could only hang my head and shake it.

Mr. Ruyne leaned across the table. "Say 'Please, Van,' " he teased.

I shook my head again — I couldn't answer. A terrible thing happened: two tears fell out of my eyes into my fruit plate as I bent over. I didn't feel like crying either.

Mr. Ruyne got up from his place and began pulling his chair around to my side. "This is dreadful," he said. "She weeps for food. Go for the coffee, Yogo."

The servant went into the little kitchen, and Mr. Ruyne fed me bit by bit. I could smile again, but I had to surmount a catch in my breast. Laughter seemed to be a sort of temporary thing — to keep off, for a little while longer, something more serious that was bound to follow.

Mr. Ruyne said: "Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and I'll give you something to make you wise," as he popped each grape into my mouth. The fourth time I opened my eyes suddenly for I knew that he was about to kiss me. I must have caught the aroma of cigarette smoke and the peculiar perfume of his hair tonic. I pushed back my chair.

"Please, Van," I implored, quite unconsciously.

"Van! at last! Well, that's something," was his only comment.

The servant came in and put the little coffee tray down before me; Mr. Ruyne went to the piano and began playing from the opera that I had heard with him. I was thinking clearly enough now. "He's going to try to kiss you

again, and you mustn't let him. He doesn't respect you, and you have been brought up to believe that respect is everything on earth. It's all your fault, too. You shouldn't have gone into that private room with him — you knew it. You shouldn't have come here — you knew it. You'll have to have an ugly scene, but you must get out. Don't carry that coffee cup over to him. Get out."

That was what was being said to me. What I did was to pour out the coffee and carry it over to him. There were two me's doing different things. I put the cup down by the music rack, and stood beside him humming the song as he played.

The air was so full of the sound of "leave, leave," that Mr. Ruyne must have heard it. But he's not the man to notice warnings that will spoil his happiness. He wouldn't suffer, either, by not heeding them. Since I'm not an aristocrat I wished I had been born in the gutter, and didn't know right from wrong.

He played on with the left hand and with the right lifted the cup to his lips. We could see the Japanese from over the music rack.

"That is all, Yogo, thank you," said his master. "I'll ring."

"Go when the man goes," tortured my mentor. I didn't move.

He took another sip of coffee, then circled his

arm around my waist, and for an instant drew me to him. I swung away from him. "I'll have to leave," I said. My voice was strange in my ears. I had to clear my throat.

"All right," he answered, drifting into another melody. "Your hat's in on my bed."

I walked away a little and looked over my shoulder. I didn't know whether to tell him I'd had a nice time or not. His eyes were grayer than ever, and cold like spring water. His face was indifferent. So it would end unbeautifully after all! I should be a disappointment to him, something ungraceful — to forget as soon as possible. And as for me — one side of me would be only moderately happy, for that is the side which never gets much joy out of anything, and the other side would be starved and miserable. Where was the justice in that?

I stopped at the fire to warm my hands. The music ended. He crossed the room to me as I stood with my hands stuck out stiffly. He put one hand on my shoulder. "Don't you like my little home, Missy?" he said very quietly.

I didn't move and I couldn't speak. He slipped his arm about my neck. My head came right under his chin. We watched the fire. I knew that I must say something. I thought if I were very crafty that I could end it beautifully and our friendship would always be a gentle memory. I cleared my throat.

"I love your little home — too much. When we love things we must run away from them."

"Why?" he asked.

Why indeed! And I had thought it was clever. I had no answer.

"No love is wasted," his gentle voice continued. "The experience of it, even if it brings pain, enriches a life. It gives you knowledge, and knowledge is what we must in duty seek."

The half of me that had carried the coffee, and stayed by the piano, and stopped to warm its hands, seized upon this: "You don't want to be ignorant, do you?" it urged.

The side that had done the moralizing tried to be heard again. At no time was it the accomplished side, and its vocabulary was meager. "Go, go," was its only cry.

Once again I temporized. I would go, but beautifully. "I have always thought it would be best to die when one is very happy. That is the reason that I want to go now — for fear I may become *less* happy."

He shrugged me against him. I didn't slip away this time. "Please God, I shall *always* keep you happy," was his reply.

He left me and went to the little kitchen. "Yogo, if any one calls, say that I am out. As for dinner —" the door closed upon him.

I was alone. I could see my things lying on

the bed in the room beyond. Now I could leave and it would not be ugly. It was all shaped gracefully. He would find me gone, and our last words had been confessions of love. He would never see me again. I could be out before he entered.

I drove myself into the bedroom and gathered up my things. My feet were heavy and my heart was sick, but I stumbled in. I discovered a door that must lead directly from this room into the hall. In that way my chances were still less of meeting him. Still less! I was chill with horror. Then it would be true — I shouldn't ever see him again! I was really bringing this about! If I went by the bedroom I might never see him again. And if by the sitting-room? The blood pumped through me. It was like a laugh. If by the living room — perhaps — I might see him once again. I went into the living room with my wraps huddled in my arms.

Van Ruyne came through the door of the little kitchen, and saw me.

"Going?" he said shortly.

I dropped the coat and hat upon the floor.

"Don't be cruel," I whispered.

He came toward me and toward me. I stretched out my arms, fingers extended, to keep him back. When he reached them he crumpled them up and came on. As his mouth was over

mine I threw back my head to avoid him. His lips rested on the hollow in my throat.

Then he helped me on with my things, for I was trembly, and, at the door, I kissed him.

XII

"Dear Mr. Ruyme:

"You said to me on Friday in your home that it was part of one's development to love and to be loved, and I agreed with you because it was so sweet to have you kiss me, and — finally — to kiss you in return. It fills out the day, doesn't it? But that is the trouble: it fills it out and fills it up, and there is no room left for anything else. I don't seem to be able to do things by halves. I can't think of my duties — of calisthenics or of the laws of reading. I forget 'the eye precedes the gesture, and locates it,' and all the other rules of Delsarte. There is only you, and the crackling fire, and the comfort and softness of it all in my mind. This cannot be, for my tuition has cost me a great deal, and I shall have to be a teacher to earn my living when my money is gone. I have no relatives at all to turn to for assistance. Therefore I must give you up. It can be done. Jennie has no one, and the women in this house go in and out, and all around the tired world alone, and if they can do without being loved, I can. Don't think I didn't have a nice time Friday. It doesn't seem real, but the flowers that

you have sent prove to me that it isn't all a dream. Although the waking would be terrible, I wish you *were* a dream, and that I couldn't reach you just by stretching out my arms. But I am going to keep them close to my side and work, and work.

“Good-by,
“Missy.”

Jennie had gone to spend the night with some people in Waltham so I had the evening to write the letter. The first few I tried were prim, and then I wrote the way I felt, and decided that it was best. Every now and then I went to the window. It was snowing hard, and the ruby beams from the revolving globe fell very faintly upon my breast. The snowflakes froze them up before they reached me, and I felt very cold and out-in-the-night. Theodora and Gracia were in their room talking in low tones to each other. I don't think they wanted me but I did go in once, anyway, to ask Gracia if she had ever kissed the gentleman who has gone to Florida, before she became engaged to him. I had to lead up to it by playing “Truth” with her. She said of course she had kissed him—how else would she have known whether or not she liked him well enough to be engaged?

That didn't surprise me much since all the girls at home accept attentions at parties and at picnics, which are of a serious nature. If I didn't kiss

every young man who drove me out to the lake and back it was because I didn't like him, not because it would have been thought awful. I wish I had been taught that it was bad taste, or ugly, or would spoil me. Perhaps then the thought of clinging close to Mr. Ruyme would be offensive to me.

After all, I only did the other day what lots of the girls at home have done — cheaply and generally. They weren't always engaged either. Not for one moment have I felt ashamed that I am not engaged to him. That is his affair. I can't ask him. And even with my eyes shut — dreaming of everything I want — I can't see him asking me to be his wife. It would be — how did he put something the other day? — it would be “out of the picture.”

I was still determined to send the letter when I went down to Sarah's kitchen to get some hot water to wash out my handkerchiefs. It was late, but to my surprise Sarah was just coming in. She fastened the door, and I heard a tramping up the back steps into the alley.

“I didn't know you had a beau,” I said to her. She was quite indignant. “The Lord help the poor gyurl ut slaves in a kitchen what hasn't. Love's the lubricatin' ile that keeps her jints a'workin' through the long day.”

I seized the thought — I wanted to, of course. If I could let it oil my work — not clog it — per-

haps — why not? The dim kitchen grew radiant. It is so splendid to find justification for what you want.

Sarah began setting the pancakes to raise for the morning. She was singing a little — I think she had had some beer. Her bonnet was on crooked, and the strings were covered with buckwheat flour, but she didn't care.

I pursued my point as she bent over the yellow bowl. "Anyway, all these women in the house get along without sweethearts, and they work — don't they?"

Sarah held the yellow bowl on either side, her head hanging over the batter, and shook silently. "Oh, dearie, dearie, dear," she repeated.

I felt bewildered. "Well, have they sweethearts?" I pressed.

"Is it them that's without the fellows!" she finally cried, "them pretty birds! Let me tell you fer yer own good there's not a creature in the house, barring you young student ladies, but's sold her latch-key."

"But's done what?" I asked.

She lifted herself erect and looked at me with an injured air. "Go along with yer hot wather, Miss Melissa, I do be talkin'."

I didn't know what she meant, but I did know that whatever those women were besides, they were certainly loved. I stood in the dark hall before opening my door. Love on all the floors!

There was something grim about my trying to run away from it while running into it. And how silly it was for me to imagine that I would keep from seeing Van just by writing a letter — when I could always write another.

I tore up what I had prepared. Love and my work must make friends and be companions.

XIII

LIFE swims along. Surely what I thought was wrong must be right, or I shouldn't prosper. Everything fits in. Flowers come to me in time to wear to school, fruit comes when we girls are having a party, and Van comes when I'm feeling lonely. Jennie has rarely met him. She goes to Waltham quite often now to see her friends. There is an instructor in the public schools there whom she likes very much. How lucky she is! The things she wants to do are always the things that are right for her to do. She passes among all kinds of people and remains full of character. I have so little of my own that I walk lame if I am behind someone on the street who is limping.

The teachers say I am impressionable. I know I love kindness, the beauty of soft nights, far-away music, the hollow of Van's arm, the cries of the world — even when it has pain in its whimper. Each day I feel like a miner who starts out with his pick to seek for new treasures. Only I always find it.

We have such fun — we girls. It begins at breakfast. The eggs at Mrs. Croakes' are awful — we have to have them fried or not at all.

Theodora always asks for poached ones, and claims only half a punch on her meal ticket because she can't get them.

A young student from Mexico admires me very much. Theodora tells him he mustn't look at me the way he does. "Why not, I love her?" he replies. He makes love with his mouth full, and it is rather terrible. Last Sunday morning he came to take me to the cathedral, but I had forgotten my appointment with him and had gone to a Back Bay church with Jennie. He wore a purple shirt and tie, Mrs. Short said, and new yellow shoes, and he stood on the doorstep crying when she told him I had left the house.

I laughed when Mrs. Short repeated this, then she said: "Oh, yes, but what if Mr. Ruyne had done that to you?"

What if he had! Someone is always being hurt in the world, and it's awfully funny unless we're the hurt ones. I went upstairs silently. "Not that there's any danger," she called after me. She likes Van. He chaffs with her when she lets him in, and if Jennie is at home she invites him into her parlor and goes downstairs into the kitchen.

Her parlor is really Jimmy the trainer's bedroom. The couch lets out. She goes next door to sleep, which must be very uncomfortable. Every evening we can hear her say good night in a loud voice, and then the front door bangs.

When the weather is bad we have to take the car down to school, which is five cents, but must be done. If it is crowded the girls often cheek their fares — I suppose the conductor really permits it because we are so shabby. I make him take my five cents always. I couldn't be under obligations to a street car conductor though I do kiss someone I care for. But then I couldn't take money from any one. At least I was taught that much if we girls at home *were* allowed to do cheap tongs and flirt with drummers.

I don't let Van know that I do without my lunches. It's strange to wear gardenias on my breast when my stomach's empty. He sent me some malt to drink at night, for he doesn't think much of Mrs. Croakes as "a wet nurse," which is the way he put it, but when he offered me the money to buy more I felt ashamed and wouldn't touch it. He called me a proudy-cat.

One night of each week our class goes out into the suburbs to do our "poses plastiques" for some church entertainment. This is good practice for us and our expenses are always paid. We are funny at the station. Each of us carries a shoe box containing a white cheese cloth Greek gown, and some have real tin make-up boxes just as actresses have. The wooden spears, shields, and helmets which we employ when posing as famous pieces of statuary are divided up among us. They are covered with white cloth to represent

marble, and we rush along like Amazons with railway tickets between our teeth.

I tell Van all about this when he is in the depths of the woolly chair and I on the arm just as I had once so fondly dreamed. He endures these stories because he wants me to tell him "everything" and he agrees with me that there is a good deal of nonsense about all this dressing up. We don't look like statuary, and many of the girls insist upon wearing stiff petticoats under their draperies.

Of late I have been going over to the Art Museum to study the Greek friezes, and it comes to me that if one followed the posturing faithfully, one ought to be able to originate a very beautiful dance that would be different from anything else. The ballet teacher is doubtful; she thinks one couldn't follow the ballet steps. I asked her if it was necessary to, and she almost put me out of the room. All the same, when I am not thinking of Van, I am planning that dance vaguely — way back in my head.

The museum is a great joy to me — if there were only more places to sit down! Standing is the tax the poor must pay in Boston. I love music and go to the symphonies on Friday afternoon, but how I have to stand to get it! First, I brace myself up out in the cold until the doors leading to the cheap seats are thrown open, and then in the aisles during the concert, as the bigger

students always get into the places ahead of me.

It is the same when we go to church. We stand until we hate our Lord. When the pews are no longer held for the regular owners we are shown into them. Every one is very courteous, and it can't be helped, I suppose, but that being pushed about in the aisle while well-dressed people sink into the chosen places breeds a bitterness in my heart which doesn't belong to the Sabbath. Some of the girls who have cold rooms attend service all day Sunday, and they are awfully tired by bedtime.

Although we go to the Back Bay, the Back Bay never come to us. We would probably resent it if they did. We aren't charity students; we are from the country, but we are well born. They couldn't do anything but "improve conditions," and the conditions are sad but not my affair. It would be much better if they built furnace fires. I have nothing to complain of. I don't see how any house could be cleaner, or warmer, or quieter than Mrs. Short's. One night a lodger who lives on the top floor, came in crying as if her heart would break — and all the way up the first flight. But Mrs. Short came right out into the hall and said: "Mrs. Belstone, will you kindly shut up?" She is very particular.

When I told Van that he almost wept. Now that I know him better I learn a great deal from

him. He doesn't laugh much for he begs me to come to him with everything that bothers me. "I want to see you grow," he says.

I didn't ask him about what Sarah said, at first, because it had an ugly sound, and I wanted him to think my house was a nice one. When I did speak I was on the little stool at the window looking out at the globe in the dusk, and he was smoking in the big woolly chair behind me. I leaned back ever so little that I might touch his knees. He pulled back the stool up to him and tucked me in closer, pinching my ears as he explained. My whole face was warm, but it is not so hard to say things in the dark.

What he explained was even worse than I thought, but, worse than that, he wasn't at all concerned over my being at Mrs. Short's. I didn't want to go away for I am comfortable and living cheaply, but I would have gone, of course, had he advised me to.

But he didn't. He clasped his hands under my chin and drew my head against his knee, so that he could see into my face. I knew that he was going to say something to startle me, for he always watches me when he advances something new. For the moment he looked brutal, but one side of me liked it so much that the other side had nothing to say.

"Missy, dear," he answered at last, "your leaving wouldn't do any good. You draw these

people — or they you — I don't know which. But this is where you belong."

I cried out, quick and loud. I thought immediately of Mrs. Short being severe with me if she heard, but I couldn't help it. I struggled to get to my feet. I was nearer running from him than I had ever been before and nearer wanting to run. He dragged me into his arms, and pulled me into the big chair with him.

"You're not on my side! You're not on my side!" was all I could say.

And "Listen to me, listen to me," he kept repeating.

Then I heard his heart beating great thumps and I knew that my trying to go was meaning a lot to him. The joy of the knowledge was so overwhelming that I grew suddenly lax. I turned my face to his rough coat, and cried.

He held me quietly, and didn't pat or paw. When there were no more sobs — no more long sighs — he talked a little about women. How all women reach for love, but some attract it, and that very quality places them curiously all through life. Adventures are their portion. If I moved to the Back Bay, even, I should soon find myself singularly surrounded. This mustn't frighten me nor must I fight it. As a reward many women would envy me, and all men desire me. "Now I've been fool enough to show you your power," was the way he ended.

XIV.

Now that I know about myself, now that this strange half of me which I have always feared is really a gift, and something that other people would like to have, I must no longer regard the quality as an intrusion on my welfare but, rather, as my welfare.

Without striving it brings me all my happiness. The Mexican boy smiles at me over his coffee cup, the president of our school grants me many favors, Van comes to me at dusk and makes the whole night beautiful by the recollection of his being there — across the room, in the big chair — for an hour. And all this on account of the possession which I feared was going to eat me up!

Nor do I feel as isolated as I did at first when I found myself among those who were not — well — not quite regular. They are not to blame. No one is to blame. I smile at them when we meet on the stairs — and they smile back at me, and say: “It’s awful bad underfoot, ain’t it?”

Sarah has done one of them an injustice. She is a Mrs. Edson, and her husband is a traveling man, so he can only be here on Sunday. She slips

in and out like a mouse during the week, always alone and always quietly, but well dressed. It is only on Sundays that she rustles, and leaves a delicate perfume when she passes. On that day she is always running out into the hall when the bell rings, hoping it is he. Mrs. Short hears her skirts, and it makes her very cross. She goes into Jimmy's room, which is her parlor, talking about lodgers who hang over the banisters and have no ideas of etiquette.

Sunday is a good smelling day in the house anyway — not counting perfumes. They always have a nice dinner down in the basement; and, not long ago, when Jennie was in Waltham, I was invited down. We ate in the kitchen before the big range, while Sarah had her meal on a little low shelf nearby. We had sweet potatoes, and one of them burst with a loud report all over me just as it was being taken out of the oven. We laughed as we used to at New Washington.

Jimmy's sister comes down every Sunday to sit through the dinner with them. She has a hall bedroom on the top floor, but she doesn't take her meals anywhere because she doesn't eat. She says she wants to keep her figure. It is hard to tell where she keeps it, for she is the thinnest woman I have ever seen — no bust whatever, and all her gowns without fullness.

Jennie has fullness in her gowns, otherwise she would be like Jimmy's sister. Gracia is growing

quite plump and when Jennie asked her how she was managing to do it, she said she bathed in salt water. Ever since then Jennie slips upstairs into the bath room with a can of salt under the towel. She hides it in her part of the washstand drawer in the room, so of course, I don't let on that I know. She seems to be staying just the same.

To go back to Jimmy's sister; she works in a shop, and when she feels the desire for food, she nibbles at candy which is the counter next to hers. Sometimes she has ice cream or coffee; and when the plumber she is engaged to marry takes her out, they have lobster. They are going to live in a suburb when they are married, and she is collecting sofa cushion covers for their flat. Mrs. Short, who is a good housekeeper, wants her to buy kitchen utensils instead, but the very thought of them makes the girl sick.

It is curious to find that most of these irregular people come from little places just as I do. I wonder if it is the narrowness of the village that makes them want to kick free from it as soon as possible? And when they kick they lose their balance. Sarah tells me that Mrs. Short has a husband who lives on a farm not very far out, and who brings her produce now and then, but he is grumpy and old. Once he came on Monday and Mrs. Short pulled all of Jimmy's shirts off the clothes line. Naturally her being so kind to the trainer would annoy Mr. Short.

Mrs. Short is kind to every one. Sometimes, on Saturday nights, we save a punch in our meal tickets by having a sort of supper in our rooms. First we go to the dairy near us and buy milk in a paper bag. I don't suppose any one outside of Boston has the intelligence to do this, but it will hold perfectly if the ends are well mucilaged, and no one pushes against us. Tech boys, who know the custom, try to strike them with their canes when we come along — as though not meaning to, of course. Theodora screams with joy, and her hair and eyes get wilder than ever. She generally allows her purchase to be burst just to see their mock horror and hear them apologize.

"Burst Missy's bag, too," she said once, because I was walking along very primly.

"Oh, she is Missy, is she?" said one of them.

I didn't enter into the game, for Van has warned me not to cheapen myself by cultivating acquaintances right and left. "Know no one, keep yourself immaculate," he advises. But the next day a big rose was left on our doorstep with a card marked "Missy." Of course I was pleased, but when I told Van he looked so bored that it became a clumsy act of a booby. I look at young boys like that nowadays and I think: "You've done some things, no doubt, that you think are awfully naughty, but you really know nothing of life. What if you could see into the heart of this one walking along with her hair down her back!"

I love my secret but I wonder if it is wholesome to have such a feeling as mine for Van burning always within me. Will it not some day shrivel me up?

When we come back from the dairy we make cocoa over the center chandelier — as the side lights have globes. Mrs. Short doesn't like us to use the gas for this, and we don't let her know. Once she knocked in the midst of the party, so we hurriedly removed the cooker and turned out the jet, but when she entered the room the chandelier was swinging like a trapeze. We blamed it on poor Mrs. Edson who lives above us. She is really as light as a feather.

Besides the cocoa there is a little tin of baked beans, and we take turns asking Mrs. Short for bread and butter, for which we always pay her five cents. Jennie is very frugal, and once, when it was her turn to ask, she was away so long that we hung over the banisters although it was unladylike, to listen. We could hear her voice soaring up from the kitchen, deep in a long recitation from Charles Dickens, the "Death of Little Nell" it was. And for that Mrs. Short gave her quite a lot of bread and butter. But then she is a senior and her recitations are worth something.

After supper we let down the bed, and lie on the sofa, and tell each other what we want to do in the future — all but Gracia, who says her future is too black to look into. She is such a shallow,

stupid girl it is hard to believe anything somber is ahead of her. I seldom feel that she is in the room, and after she has gone I can't remember her having said anything. I can think of her only in the days to come on a veranda in a suburb — rocking. She seems planless.

Jennie has her life carved out for years. She will be a teacher — for a while — but “ultimately go into platform work, associating herself with the Y. M. C. A. lecture bureau.”

Theodora is very philosophic. She says she will go whichever way the wind blows hardest, as that will be easier than anything else, but she hopes it will blow her toward the stage.

She isn't alone in that. Most of the seniors, although they are going to be teachers, speak of the stage as their real profession. They seem to feel it is just lack of opportunity which prevents them being successful actresses. They want to stand up and have people look at them — even the homely ones want it.

I don't wish that. When I go to the theater now, I stare more at the size of the stage than I do at the performers, and when an actress is left alone up there I don't see how she endures it. I turn away so that there will be one less person boring holes into her with indifferent eyes. She is such public property — she is for any one.

Still my original ideas have changed. Once I hoped to be in a school with only bright, pleasant

girls for companions whom I would teach to speak and to carry themselves well, and to sway with music. I wanted to be completely surrounded by them, and hidden by them, so that I couldn't get out of their good sweet circle if I wished to. Now I must plan to have some way of escape every little while. I must give my other side a chance. Always, always in my plans, there is Van whom I shall ever love and who will always love me — I hope. And who will preserve this beautiful relationship which exists between us — I know.

XV

I HAVE been here three months and I have known Van over ten weeks. "Ten weeks" isn't very lovely in sound to other people, but it is to me, just because I've known him that long. All the things that surround him have a beautiful significance. "Overcoat" and "cigarette-case" and "hair tonic," I say them softly.

Yet I have found that he can hurt me — just as he can make me happy. Isn't it strange that any one should want to do that! He must have liked it. When it was all over he seemed so robust and unsuffering, as though my being crushed for a while was a feast to make him strong.

Perhaps he wanted to punish me. I had been out to his rooms the evening before for dinner. I am quite familiar with everything there now. I go in and brush my hair with his brushes, and if he hasn't come in yet I chat a little with Yogo. He speaks of me as "rattle miss" to Van and addresses me as "Miss Lobinson."

This night I was asking him about his mother and sisters in Japan, and I was wondering why he won't ever talk of his family to me, when Van

came in. He was so quiet, though, that I didn't hear him, didn't know that he was in the room. He came up behind me, drew me back against him and kissed me. And Yogo saw us.

Everything that is left in me of New Washington boiled up. In a rage I struck him in the face. Yogo went into the little kitchen.

Van was white. "If you were a man, Missy, I'd send you spinning through that window."

I was staring at him, with my hands doubled up on my breast. "Not before servants, not before servants," was all I could say.

"Why not?"

"Because it's not decent."

"Not, eh? May a man kiss his wife before a servant?"

"Of course."

"And he kisses her because he loves her, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't I love you?"

He was hedging me about with snares, and I knew it. Also I knew that I would be snared, but I was still running around in the meshes. I could see myself as a sort of little rabbit.

"Don't I?" he persisted.

"I hope so, Van."

"And don't you suppose that Jap knows we love each other?"

"It's my only excuse for being here."

"And if we love each other, that we kiss each other?"

"I hadn't thought, does he?"

"Of course he does. So what difference does it make whether he's in the room or out of it. What difference does it make anyway to any one outside of your New Washington what a servant sees? He is nothing but an automaton. As soon as we can find machines to do the work of servants we'll dispense with them altogether. I suppose *you* will be haughty before a machine?"

I laughed. I was glad to laugh again — besides, I knew he wanted me to. He sat down at the piano and played moodily. I looked at him as I stood in the center of the room. His heavy-lidded gray eyes rested on me.

"I am still hurt," he said.

I went over and rubbed his poor cheek gently against mine. "I'm sorry I struck you." A sort of delightful enervation was stealing over me. I believe that the passions — those of anger and those that come from much loving are the same, and hating violently is nearer love than is just mild affection.

"It isn't my cheek only, little child," Van went on; "you've hurt the best of me — the quality that I've always tried to give you. You grant me nothing for — for a self-control that some men would not have exercised."

I went on smoothing him, but my mind was

leaping about. Always in books when a man has kissed a woman, she ceases to be a good woman, and soon despair and desertion are her punishment. But Van has held me in his arms and I have clung to him — still I can say my prayers at night. In a way, he has sheltered me from those who would not be so gentle.

I bent down and whispered in his ear: "It is this very quality that makes me love you so."

To my surprise he shrugged me off, and, rising, held me back with his hands on my shoulders. "Oh, no, it isn't," he answered, "it is *this* quality that makes you love me so," and he suddenly, roughly, powerfully pulled me into his arms and held me there. The scarab of his scarf pin cut into my forehead. I could hear Yogo come into the room, but I didn't try to get away. Only, I knew then why the servant wouldn't talk to me of his mother and sisters.

If I hurt Van that night he hurt me the next day — this is where my punishment comes in. And why should tragic things happen on the first day that breathes of spring! From now on — forever — when the odor of warm wet earth reaches my nostrils — when I shall want to scream aloud the news that green things are beginning to grow again, a sort of spasm of pain will twist my heart as the cruel old association comes welling up with the rich promise of the hour.

I had come home from Cambridge in the rain,

but as I am sent in a cab, I don't mind, and love to hear the patter on the roof. The cab is charged to Van, and he gives me a quarter to tip the man, which I hold in my hand all the way. I stare out at the wet ones and wish to give them all a ride — they look in at me, thinking I'm rich, perhaps. They don't know how much I should like to keep the quarter.

The next day it rained, too — soft, beautiful rain which made the Common look younger than its age, and my heart was bursting like the buds as I walked through it. I stayed late for extra lessons, and when I reached the room toward dusk, Van was there talking about "force and stress" to Jennie. It was perfectly amazing how glad she was to get away and sit in the kitchen. I danced all about the room singing "Spring has come, and so has another one," the window was open a little and a hand organ was playing new and popular airs. Everything was new, and feeling popular. Even the trolley wires were singing, and no longer snapping overhead at each other.

Van asked me to get him an evening paper to see the market, and I went in to borrow it of Gracia. Her beloved, before he went to Florida, had paid in advance for a newspaper right up to the end of school.

I found Gracia crying. It occurred to me that she hadn't been happy of late, and I, who was very happy, should give her some of my joy. So

I asked her to come into my room to meet Mr. Ruyme. Her tears disappeared all of a sudden as though they had not been, and she came in to share my happiness.

She isn't much to look at as I've said before. Her nose turns up — hopelessly — not as though it would grow out of the habit, which I hope mine will do. She frizzes her brown hair and does it like Jimmy's sister, the thin shop girl. But I suppose well-dressed women are attractive. All her skirts trail, and she has fur on the edge of them — not good fur, but fur — like Beacon Street.

She smoked a cigarette with Van. I don't smoke. It seems silly to do what makes one uncomfortable. They laughed at me because I didn't. Van told her of the champagne that went up into my nose at our first supper, and they laughed again. They went on to talk of things to drink, and I wasn't even noticed. Gracia is from the country just as I am, and I don't suppose she ever heard of anything stronger than sweet cider until she came here. And now she tells Van she doesn't care for anything with her meals, but enjoys a cocktail before eating! Of course she never has one at all. Just once I spoke.

"You don't get them at Mrs. Croakes'," I remarked, but they looked over my head.

After that she said she could read palms!

I sat on the stool by the open window and let

the soft air blow on me. The globe of the drug store was revolving, but the lights stubbed me, and the ruby ray would gleam like a rush of blood upon my white blouse — then whirl — then come again. It was so dim in the room that Gracia was very close to him. I was too proud to light the gas. It wouldn't have done any good, anyway. When a woman wants to get close to a man she will find a reason. Van kept encouraging her by: "Corking!" and "Oh, I say, am I as bad as that!"

I have never found any flaws in Van, at least none that I haven't, after a while, turned into stronger points. But I thought him rather pleased than otherwise when Gracia said he was a bad man; pleased just as one of the boys at home would have been. I wondered, for an instant, if he was getting along so well with Gracia because they were really alike: both of them pretending to be something that they weren't. Then I remembered how he had been brought up in Paris, and not in New Washington, and of course he couldn't be a bragger.

"Aren't you ripping," he was saying admiringly.

"Oh, mercy! Where?" she cried, trying to be witty.

"Here," answered Van. I didn't turn around but I understood.

She gave a little squeal and scolded him.

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I kept looking out of the window at the whirling globe, my world, so bright and cruel, throwing colors without caring as to whom they fell upon. I never knew before that the same thing could be so different on different nights.

I planned what I should do when Gracia went away, for someone was to meet her at the Thorn-dyke and she would have to leave in an eternity or two. First I decided I should say, "Don't touch me," as he came forward. But I gave that up, for then he wouldn't even argue, only go home. No, I should say, "You will have to choose between us, Van." But, later, I gave that up, for if he chose Gracia I should die.

I groaned aloud at this. To cover it, I made myself hum the nightingale song we had heard at the opera together. I hoped he would catch the air, and remember how he had smiled at me out of the darkness, but he didn't. I kept my head up — if I leaned over, the tears would fall out of my eyes.

I was just an ordinary girl sitting at a window. On all the floors of our house women were sitting looking out as I was — were suffering as I was. Poor women! There is no escape for them and for me. We are irregular, Van said so. We are born for love and so all our lives we will have to sit politely and be hurt. The stretch ahead of me was appalling. I wished that I was older, then Van couldn't hurt me for quite so long.

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Now the other hand," Gracia was saying.

Suppose I gave him up altogether? I seized the idea gladly as though it was something very new and easy. Suppose I said nothing after she went away, talked commonplaces as I got ready for dinner at Mrs. Croakes'—and never spoke to him again. I might even look down from the window upon him the next time he called while Mrs. Short told him I could not be seen. I hated him. My heart burned with injustice. I could see that unless I took a desperate step I should have to put up with such humiliations for the rest of my life.

I talked to myself sternly on the subject. I was very much excited and in earnest. I found myself praying for Gracia to go that I might speedily bring this thing about. I wanted it, that is, I seemed to want it, but when Gracia finally started I found, instead, that I was trying to detain her.

My heart was beating furiously. There was some consolation that I had decided on no war of words. I never last long when it comes to argument. But now I was fighting for a principle. That strengthened me: "fighting for a principle!"

Gracia banged my door, banged her door, banged the front door. I was at the wardrobe getting down my hat. My fingers stuck out and

wouldn't bend. Van sat down in the woolly chair again — the light was almost gone.

He looked toward me. "Missy?"

I didn't answer. I was fighting for a principle. The principle was still right, but there was a looseness about my heart which had nothing to do with it.

"Missy?"

I didn't answer, but it was because I wouldn't let myself. The principle was on the far side of an abyss. I might follow it but I should not be of it. It was an alien to me — this principle — a thing that would bring me the greatest sorrow of my life — and be nothing to him. Then what would be accomplished! Better get joy when I can.

"Missy!"

I looked toward him. He extended his hands which showed white in the darkness, and raised them as one prepares for a baby. With a moan I ran forward, and climbed into his arms.

XVI

THE spring in Boston is like being in love: bad days slip in among the good ones, and the whole world is at a standstill, then the sun shines, the tears dry up, and we forget that yesterday was stormy. My blood goes crazy at this time of the year. I keep out of doors, and am nursing a crocus in the Public Gardens, which thinks of coming up, until I feel like its mother.

At nights I can't sleep. I send little notes to Van just to say that I am going to bed and shall think of him. These letters only make him scoff, for there is always Jennie in the red flannels.

When I go out late to post them, Theodora sometimes goes with me. The pavements are damp, the lamp lights shroud themselves in a mist for the sake of lovers. People laugh out loud, one can hear them a long ways off. We have to walk to Commonwealth Avenue to get trees, and, since they are not out yet, I think that there is more spring in the unlovely streets that have no green things.

"I suppose your heart is swelling, isn't it, Missy?" asked Theodora. She makes fun of me for feeling so much and thinking so little.

"Yes, it is," I admitted. "Of late I seem to be inside of it, not it inside of me. But if my heart is swelling my purse isn't. That keeps us starving. We stretch with our arms open wide for all beautiful things when we have that luxurious, rich sensation; but luxuries cost money and we haven't money. I hadn't expected to find this in Boston. I thought it would be enough to look in the shop windows."

Theodora flouted it. "You forget that any woman *can* have pretty things if she wants them hard enough."

I was feeling guilty, I had some reason to. "Not unless someone is very kind," I argued weakly.

"Not unless *she* is very kind," she snorted again.

I gripped her arm in resentment against this theory. She swung me around in a half circle and we started home. Theodora takes a rather dreadful view of life, but it doesn't depress her. The fact that evil is part of living makes it endurable and rather pleasant, for she contends that existence is amusing. She goes around among all kinds of people, but she cares for no one, and I have decided that love is the pass word opening into a world of understanding of which Theodora, with her wisdom, knows nothing. All of my views have changed since I met Van.

"You forget," I said firmly, "that there are men AND men."

"No, there aren't," she retorted, "there are just men."

Her assurance shook me for the moment. I always go with the last voice. "And are there just women too?" I thought with terror of all those sleeping in our house that night.

"That's what's funny — there are lots of different kinds of women."

"Then there are some," I argued, "who wouldn't give freely of themselves just to have pretty things, aren't there?"

"Yes," she admitted grudgingly, "especially the rich ones."

"And there must also be others," I pursued, "who receive — not that they deserve it — but who receive beautiful things without hurting themselves, don't you think?"

Theodora flipped about impatiently. "I wouldn't call it 'hurting themselves' anyway. They have a right to go on exchange if they want. What makes me mad is that women deceive themselves about the way they get things. They call it by pretty names, but the men know they are getting something by giving something. They have a business-like knowledge of such values which is intuitive."

"They are ahead of us in everything, aren't they?"

"In all but the oldest profession in the world," she answered cheerfully.

It took a moment for me to understand what she meant, then I went on: "They are ahead of us even there, for they're not marketable, and that gives them one less evil to fight. How wonderful — never to have to fight!"

Theodora checked herself in her walk, hair and eyes very wild. "I never gave you credit for thinking out life as far as that. When did you make this discovery?"

"Oh, I have a great deal of time to think on the nights that Jennie snores."

"Poor Missy," she laughed, "I've been there, too"; we went on, arms linked together, so friendly yet not at all agreeing. "It's too bad you haven't a congenial roommate — someone to play tag with you — you're such a kid. I ought to have looked after you more, but I've had my hands full with Gracia this year. It's as wicked for women who are strangers to sleep together as it is for strange men and women."

I gasped but I didn't want to let her know she had shocked me — Theodora was saying out loud what other people only think. We never do that at New Washington. I groped around hurriedly for an idea. "It all harks back to our original idea: poverty's a crime. But there is a law of adjustment, isn't there?" I was trying to find out about something without asking outright.

"Don't you believe that a lovely happening might come to us as a sort of reward for our being so dismal — as a reward for eating at Mrs. Croakes', for instance —"

Theodora withdrew her arm. "No more of that, please, Missy. Play in the dust pile if you want to, fill your own eyes, but don't throw it into mine."

"I'm not throwing dust," I cried in anguish.

"You're not? Now I'm going to ask you something — all of a sudden, so get a grip: What did you give in exchange for that expensive hat upstairs behind the bed?"

Blood raced all over my body. "Why, Theodora, I didn't give anything. And I've been speaking generally — not about myself. What a fool a girl would be to grant even the smallest favor for just a hat."

"Well, you're lucky," she answered, "if you could get *that* hat for nothing."

She started up the steps but I clung to her. Theodora and I had talked school, and teachers, and muscles of the fore arm ever since I knew her. Now all of a sudden, on a spring night, we were talking truth and I had been the first to lie. It occurred to me that ever since I had begun meeting Van I had been obliged to make many excuses that weren't truthful, but I hadn't given them a name. I had not found it difficult to tell Jennie that I had bought the hat at a bargain, and

after a while I thought I really had. Yankees hide their emotions, and we, in that way, grow accustomed to any form of secretiveness.

"I didn't give up anything, Theodora," I gasped, "but I did commit a little bad error because Mr. Ruyme gave me the money to buy the hat. It was he who insisted. He said I must look better when I went out with him."

"Yes," acquiesced my friend, "and that made it possible."

"That made it possible?" I repeated. "You mean I wanted it because it was pretty, and that getting it to please him was my excuse as well as his?"

"Well, wasn't it?" asked Theodora bluntly.

I took a deep breath. "Yes, it was." I stood on the front step of our house so as to be on a level with her, and lowered my voice for fear Jimmy, the coach, might hear us. "You know how I walked for miles every day after school hoping to find a cheap and still a distinguished looking one, and you know how the cheap ones sat up on my head. In less than four months I've learned to want only the best, and to know it when I see it. I can't have everything that is correct, but it is such a joy to go out looking right. It makes me surer, and I can hold my ground better with Mr. Ruyme then. He likes me better, too, when I am not afraid of him — I — I — don't mean that I'm afraid of him but his clothes are

impressive. You don't think I'm very awful, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Theodora so stoutly that I had to speak of Jimmy and the open window. "I hope you'll get lots of hats out of him, and everything else you want. He doesn't wish you to meet any other men, and have good times, and he ought to pay for it."

I started to protest, but she swept on:

"But listen. I take lunch every now and then with the head of a religious newspaper. He has a wife, but she doesn't care for him, and I don't blame her. There is nothing to admire about him except steaks, and they don't grow on him. He orders them at a restaurant when I'm so hungry that I have to walk into his office about noon to ask how he is. Well—he doesn't tip the waiter, and by the time the ice cream has arrived I am so miserable knowing what's coming to the poor servant, or rather, what's not coming, that I have nervous indigestion for hours afterward. My point is, Missy, that that old skeep-zicks would never believe that I give anything for the pound of flesh, whereas I'd throw the next steak in his face if I didn't get so starved for wholesome food. I'm glad you have the hat, dearest, but don't lose sight of the fact that you've given something for it, or if you haven't yet, he'll be calling at the first of the month."

I put my arms around Theodora and kissed

her. She was the first girl I had kissed for a long time — always before it has been the other way round. I was proud to have a real friend at last, one who could help me and whom I could help. Even though my experience with Gracia's meeting Van had been a sad one, I wanted Theodora to know him, and to learn that there is one man who is different from the others.

XVII

IT is surely spring. I awake with a pressure in the back of my head that makes me want to do a million things at once. I can hardly wait until I get down to the Common to see how the trees are doing, and then I can hardly wait until I get to the Gardens to look after the tulip beds. All this time I want to be choosing frocks from out the Boylston Street windows. I shan't have any of these frocks. When I have picked a model I take a long walk out Tremont Street and describe it to a dressmaker who has a fashion plate in the front window. Once when I was younger I believed that such dresses would be faithful copies of the expensive ones, now I know that they won't in any way resemble them. Otherwise the dressmaker would not be living out on Tremont St. with a fashion plate in the window.

Jennie says it's wrong to think so much about clothes, but it's just a springtime desire like building a nest. Of course she has not nest-building instincts. She is going to graduate at the head of the class, though, and is working frantically

with the salt water in the hope of getting fat enough to fill her new dress.

Gracia is growing quite heavy and fainted the other day at school from lacing so tightly. She is to wear white satin, but she cries all the time she is being fitted. Her mother has come up to town — Theodora gave up her room and is staying at Mrs. Croakes'.

The mother is a fat little woman made to laugh, but she only does this when some of us come in to see her. When they are alone I can hear the murmur of anxious talk. Soon the father is to arrive, and then the young man from Florida.

The other day Gracia had a letter from him, and she cried out to her mother, "He won't come!"

Then her mother answered: "Oh, yes, he will." I would not have believed that she was fat and smiling, hearing that voice.

The Juniors have nothing to do with the graduating exercises beyond wearing pink ribbons on their arms. The ballet mistress wanted me to do a little dance, but the president put his hand on my shoulder and declared that he intended to hide me until next year that I might come as a sensation. I was very proud.

Theodora, in spite of the time of the year, isn't happy. The president read a post card, although it was addressed to her, from a liquor merchant asking her where to send the whisky she had

ordered. It was really for an old Maine fisherman but you can't make the president believe it. She never thought to ask why he read her mail. Her hair and eyes have been wild for days, and she says she wishes now she had drunk it all and gone to school screaming the president's name all through the Common.

I see Van almost every other day. Spring is dear but there is nothing more beautiful in the world than a red car going out to Cambridge. If I'm not in one when I see them jolting over the Park square tracks, a little piece of my heart goes just the same; and when I am in one my heart jolts more than the tracks and nobody in the car except me knows what is heaving them about so.

Van is going to Europe on the day I go to New Washington. Every time he mentions it I am wrapped in a cold mist, and my eyes get swimmy. He only looks at me then, and says: "Well?" It is like an unfinished story. I talk about something else quickly.

When Jennie snores I think of him on the gay boulevards of Paris. Sometimes I am with him, accompanied by Mrs. Andrews — although it is very hard to think it that way. Whenever I see a picture of Europe now, I stop and look at it. Whenever I am close against him I say: "Remember, Melissa, remember how it feels to be near him." I know that I shall have only this to think of all summer.

Yesterday I looked at his nose and eyes and brow — but not at his mouth — so that I might not forget. He was also staring at me, and I thought that he too might be trying to commit the moment by heart. I asked him, but he said he was thinking of steamer tickets. He never says what I hope he will, but I love him just as much for, always, after he hurts me, he caresses me — and I let him. It is the only time that I feel I am losing something by caring for him.

This day he put his lips against mine and I shut my eyes trying to remember that, but he went on speaking and his heavy teeth almost cut me. "Missy," he started, "the time has come —"

I opened my eyes that I might cease remembering anything about his mouth, putting my finger involuntarily to my hurt lip. The action was more simple than — I think — Van wished. He shrugged his shoulders and reached for a cigarette. "No the time has *not* come," he amended.

I don't know yet what he meant, I don't want to know. I didn't stay to dinner and I went home in the red car feeling sort of detached and unclaimed. When we reached the Gardens I took a little walk in them among the tulips. The flowers don't know any more than I do why they came and why they cannot remain.

One tulip had been so beaten down by the heavy rain that it was all bemired. I tried to lift

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it up, but the weight of the soil was too great. I cleaned it off, but it had lost its beauty and ambition. If someone had come earlier it might have been easily saved.

XVIII

THE graduating exercises are over — my trunk is packed. I have left out my new spring suit, and I am going to wear it to travel in, yes, and my best hat, too! I shall need all the beautiful things to comfort me that I have. The gown I wore last night at the school I am leaving out also, for I can lay it on top after I come home from dinner with Van. Come "home," did I say? Van is my home; I shall be leaving it.

Most of the Juniors wore thin white but I bought a creamy sort of wool crêpe so that I could go to the theater in it with Van next winter. It has gobelin blue velvet for a belt, and the sleeves and deep guimpe are of net. I ripped up an old family handkerchief to put real point lace on my chemise underneath. I don't know what Mrs. Andrews will say, but the lace over the flesh and the net over that is lovely.

Van was splendid. He didn't come, of course, but he sent a carriage for the evening, and flowers to the four of us. There were big bouquets for the three Seniors — which they carried down and had handed up over the footlights as a surprise — and a little knot of pansies for me, held together

by an enameled pin of pansies with diamonds in the center. I keep wondering how I can explain it when I get to New Washington.

After all, it wasn't such a happy evening. I didn't know I cared so much for Jennie until, during her recitation, the red flannels stuck up from the low cut dress. Why couldn't she have taken them off and not stuffed them down! But, no, no, "not until June," said Jennie. She is going to be a teacher, now, and she may never have another chance of reciting to the Boston audience that lost their sense of humor through the paralyzing effect of that creeping red. I pray she may never know why they stopped laughing at her selection and watched her in cold horror.

Theodora was unfortunate as well. Her gown was right, and her recitation was comic — too comic. It was about an Indian flying around an old lady's sitting-room while she sat on the what-not. As Theodora began to describe it she began to see it, and how funny it was. So she laughed and laughed until nobody else did, and the more she tried to stop the more hysterical she became. I thought the president would die of mortification, and I suppose he will always attribute it to the fisherman's whisky, but it is not the truth. He doesn't know talent when he sees it. Something tells me that if any of them ever reaches the stage, Theodora alone will stay there.

And Gracia! It is she that brought to the clos-

ing exercises a mysterious hint of the life we girls must encounter. Silly and snub-nosed as she is, she was the one to bring it. She was laced into her white satin, with her face just as white. She recited something about a race horse "winning, winning, winning."

In the center of the room sat her mother, very anxious. Beside her was the father, shaggy eyebrowed, with fists clenched upon his knees, applauding at first, then stopping when his wife pinched him. One can't applaud one's own daughter. In the back of the hall was the young man who had come up from Florida. He was originally from Gracia's home town, but he had inherited a little money and had been in Boston a year or two spending it. His Harvard dress suit fought against him. He leaned over, with his eyes upon the floor, his white gloved hands, which seemed to hurt, were hanging limply over his legs. He was sorry and afraid, but he did not appear to be the one to say he wouldn't come to meet his sweetheart.

Some one sang "Auld Lang Syne," there was a good deal of kissing, and after a long while we reached the rooms — Jennie and I, for the other two had gone off to the young man's party. Mrs. Short, an honored guest at the exercises, crackled in to talk it over; Jimmy paid us compliments from the hall; several of the ladies passed the door unnecessarily.

The house was no sooner quiet, than, to our surprise, Theodora came in. We inferred that Gracia was staying downtown with the family, for Theodora had a messenger boy, and sent off some garments to her. She came in looking rather tame — for her — and very quiet. I petted her. "You mustn't mind," I started, "it's not the end of you, my darling."

"No," she said. "It's the Commencement, isn't it? The real commencement of our lives. Jennie's going off to teach to-morrow, I'm out to hunt for work, and Gracia,— well, she learned a lot in her two years in Boston, didn't she!"

"She learned enough to catch a husband," said Jennie with much force. "She's going to be married."

"She *is* married," replied her roommate simply. "Was married half an hour ago."

Jennie and I stared at her in amazement. Was it for this that my heart had ached for Gracia, for Gracia whom some man loved enough to marry!

"Yes," continued Theodora, "he didn't duck. She can let her corsets go unlaced from now on — poor, tortured girl."

Jennie leaned forward as I leaned backward, automatically.

"Not that?" whispered Jennie.

"Of course," she said. "I thought you guessed."

Jennie and I hadn't guessed. They went on to

talk of it, but I couldn't speak for wondering. They had all learned different things, those girls. Knowledge, of a kind, had come to Jennie; Theodora was wise, with no ideals left to tempt her; and the fruit of the tree was ripe in Gracia's garden.

"Education is a young woman's armor," the president had said at the Commencement.

XIX

HAD it been a tipsy student or a coarse man in the street; had it been a negro, someone who didn't know me, who hadn't studied me, I would not be so flat upon the earth. The day might come when I could lift my head, the hour might come when the sobs way down within my heart would rise and fall, then rise and fall, then disappear.

But Van! But Van! And for him to be astonished when the blow sent me reeling out of his arms — not into them. For him to be astonished that it *was* a blow.

"What is the difference?" he railed at me. "You are of my life, we have grown together. Don't stunt this growth — be of my life completely."

He must have said this hours after I had seen the steamer tickets — I don't know. It sounded late in the street when there were silences in the room. I had never seen those big documents before. There were two, one for him, and one for — I had to look again — for "Mrs. Robinson" it read. After a while I understood that I was Mrs. Robinson — me with my hair always falling

down! "I was responsible to no one," had been his argument. "I had no folks."

I had tried to run. I remembered the door in the bedroom and I wanted to get through it. I was intercepted. There had been every kind of emotion — tears, and grief beyond tears; I had struck out with my hands, and been shaken. His voice had been ceaseless at first, trying to quiet my horror. It was only toward the end that words came to me.

I was crouched down in a corner of his study by that time, my face pressed against the books. I had thought to run again and go out by Yogo's little kitchen — he had gone, left for the night — but my knees had given out completely. Van was towering over me, but only physically. There was a tower of strength inside of me — only, until my knees and heart could get their courage I must stay huddled there.

"Missy, speak to me," he demanded; "why are you so crushed? You love me?"

"Yes, I love you," my voice was hardly a voice at all. He knelt down to hear me better. "And I've glorified you. I put you way up high."

"I never asked it of you."

"No, it was my joy. You were different from other men to me. Stories came to me of life, and always you were different."

"Don't you know that a man and woman can't continue this way?"

I drew a long breath; I was not afraid to answer him — for the first time I was not afraid of annoying him. "They don't have to continue this way, Van. When men and women care so much that they can't leave each other, then they marry."

"Ah!" He arose, and I heard him settling down in the big willow chair.

I was not ashamed. "I don't want you to marry me. Even I can see that it wouldn't do. I've never thought of that. I have just thought of going on, and going on. I haven't had an end at all. Women do that."

"I'm not a marrying man, dear girl."

"I've known it all along."

He laughed harshly. "Well, by the eternal! You've not expected me to marry you, and you've not counted on a deeper relation than the present one, yet you have kissed me, and we have clung like lovers. Is that New Washington?"

I turned about and dragged myself up. When I began to think, strength came to me. "Yes, that's New Washington. Girls and young men flirt on the streets, meet in shady woods, make love in hammocks, and kiss each other. Oh, not as we do! No two people in the world could ever have loved each other as we have done. It has been wrong; we've been walking on the danger line, but the first danger was back at home where mild loving was condoned."

He brought his fist down upon the arm of the

chair. "And do you compare that miserable, squalid spooning with our magnificent happiness?"

"No — no! But it was my primer."

"Then you admit that you have gone on to finer text-books?"

I wavered, he was hedging me about again, but it would make no difference. "Yes, it is to finer text-books, but books that were not for us."

"Why not? Do you deny yourself an education?"

I thought of the speech of the president: "Education is a young woman's armor." How we can twist an idea to suit ourselves!

"All education should be for our good," I said.

"And is there no good in our loving each other?"

"No, for we are not to marry."

"So the mumblings of a priest, the scratch of a pen, is what makes two individuals virtuous!"

"I have been taught to believe that."

For an instant he was silent. We were standing at either end of the room now, facing each other. Van Ruyne was fighting me as though I was his enemy. His attacks were swift and many sided. I could not meet them at all; I had not the knowledge or the language, but he was only saying words. They held no temptation for me. I bent and waved in the storm, but I had no thought of breaking.

He tried again: "Tell me this, since I have to go back to first principles with you, have you ever found any place in the Bible where it is wrong to love?"

"No," I answered.

"Then it can't be wrong for you to love me."

"No!" I answered.

"Is it your fault," he continued, "that I don't marry you?"

"No," I answered. I was still not ashamed.

"Is there any reason that you should deny yourself the healthy life of a woman in love because some other creature can't recognize the laws of civilization?"

"No." He was closing in upon me, but I was quite untouched.

"All that is asked of us is to do the best we can in life, isn't it?"

"Yes, Van."

"And wouldn't this be the best for you, since I am so low a cur as to offer you nothing else?"

"Yes, Van."

He approached me. "Missy, sweetheart, I'll take the blame. It's just your bad luck that you found me."

He put his hands upon my upper arm. His fingers closed, tightening softly into the flesh. I knew in another moment he would throw me roughly aside, that the end of my lovely spring had come, but I was unwavering. "I can't argue

with you, Van. But it's no use. There are generations back of this. You wouldn't be overcoming me, you'd be overcoming an army."

To the last he surprised me. He released his hold, gave me an indifferent pat on either arm, and slinging on a cap, walked to the door.

"Take the cab I send for you and go home. I'd give you some supper, but I'm out for a girl, not a host."

He went off. I took the red car back, as I hadn't money enough to pay for the cab, and I wouldn't charge it. I left the little pansy pin, but I couldn't have left the hat — that would have been silly.

It was the midnight car, full of nice people who knew each other. They had been to a party. Not one would have believed that a girl was among them who had just been insulted.

I kept wrapping my cape about me — I don't know why. I think at first I did it to protect the cream wool crêpe, then I kept on doing it. I heard the lady next to me say to the gentleman who was bending above her: "This fidgety girl child must think I'm a leper." Then she laughed.

A woman laughing at me seemed to be too hard a cross to bear just then. I was afraid I was going to cry before we reached Park Square, but I kept my tongue against the roof of my mouth.

I ran in little spurts most of the way home. A policeman cried: "Go it." Sometimes I cried

out loud, but my voice frightened me. The bed seemed empty without Jennie. I didn't sleep all night, and I lived his going out of the room over and over again.

If he had struck me, I could have believed he cared.

Now there is nothing to look back upon.

PART II

I

YESTERDAY morning, as soon as I had finished the dishes, I went out into my flower garden which Mrs. Andrews allows me along the back fence, and I found that the China asters were showing their colors. Then I knew that the summer was over. I was very glad. There will never be a summer like it again. I may be again unhappy, but it will not be my first unhappiness. From now on grief and I will not be strangers when we meet.

I pity women who have only domestic cares to take the place of a sorrow. They don't. It is then, cares and sorrow too. I can sweep a floor and see Van's face in the dust motes; I can shell peas on the kitchen steps as though handling his dinner service. I can iron Mrs. Andrews' aprons with my head against the rough tweed of his coat.

Once more I have had to readjust my beliefs to life. Now I know that I shall go on doing it forever. When I left Boston I had thought I could never again retain a loving memory of Van. As the long weeks have crept in and out I have found that remembering him lovingly was all that

was left in my mind. I know, too, that some other force than my will must crowd him out of my memory. I want to crowd him even though I cling to him.

When I first came home I dreaded to step off the train for fear no one would recognize me. I need not have been worried, though. There were a lot of girls and boys down to meet me and they knew me right away. If there was anything different in my face they didn't have time to notice it.

I was being hugged around the neck a great deal until some one cried, "Don't spoil her swell hat." It was Van's present, and the recollection that it brought me sounded against my heart as one strikes a gong with a hammer. It was very defined.

Even while we were struggling over who should carry my bag, and I was laughing, my knees were weak from a sort of consternation. I had hoped that I might be able to leave Boston behind me just as I had left New Washington behind me when I reached the city. But already the old familiar signs of misery were tapping against my heart's chamber. Sorrow wanted to come out and spread over my face to show my friends what it could do to quite ordinary features.

I didn't let it. We do not feel as proud of some emotions as we do of others. Yet they are all the same — they all come from an overflow

of the spirit. We are eager to suggest that we are successful and prosperous so we let the happy emotions out to play, but the ones that admit failure we lock away like a sin.

We went through the waiting room to descend the steps that led to the half circle of dusty gravel, and there was Everett standing by the best hack. The first thing I thought was: "What a young boy!" He was too excited to shake hands with me. "I've engaged it," he said; "jump right in."

I hesitated, for it was nice of the crowd to come down to see me. "Aw, let's all walk up," said one of the boys. "Don't put on so much dog, Ev."

The hack driver, whom I have always known, was annoyed. "Walk yerself," he upbraided. "Everett Austen's paid fer this hack, and she's a goin' t' ride in it."

"Could two of the girls go up with us?" I suggested as a compromise.

Everett looked at the driver, and he was not so sympathetic this time. He stared back. "I ain't nothin' against their ridin'. It's your extra half dollar."

"Don't be so afraid you won't get your money," retorted Everett, feeling that it was time to be severe. "I guess the Austen Hardware Company can stand a dollar. Room for two, girls."

Such of those as had their young men friends with them preferred to walk. Although it was pleasant to drive in an open carriage through the town; although they would see their young men after supper every evening during the summer, they didn't want to lose a chance of going back home with them. I knew how they felt.

Two of the girls were glad to go up, however. One of them has an admirer who clerks in the waterworks, and she could wave to him as we drove past. The other had quarreled with the cornet player of the band because he wouldn't leave the rehearsal to go down to the depot with her. She rode backwards with Everett and when we passed the band room in the courthouse which the city donates for rehearsal, she leaned against him affectionately. As a coming partner in the store he is quite dangerous. She was never a lucky girl, as she told me afterwards. Her father saw her "lallygagging," and the band was playing "Poet and Peasant" and not looking out. It *was* bad luck, for business generally stops when the passengers from the five o'clock train turn into Main Street.

After we had driven the girls to their homes, we went down the wide, quiet road together. They had laid a block pavement in the early spring and Everett said, over and over: "Do you notice anything?" as soon as we rolled onto it. The driver, too, kept looking back to see how

I liked the improvement. I smelled the tar first, and then had to be told.

"I thought it was the fine springs to the hack," I explained to the driver. He said it was a good deal that, too.

The sun flecked through the green boughs overhead — the same black branches that had been coated with ice in the winter. This is the highway that leads to Boston, but now it is not confined by sidewalks which end where the open begins. There is a block pavement, and New Washington will not drive beyond its comfort. A great desire possessed me to live happily within the hollow square of this town. Of trying to do it. Those girls who preferred to walk — I am like them. The one who leaned on Everett's fat chest to make another jealous — I am like her.

Why shouldn't one place be as good as another for me? Why should we care so much about the housing of the body. The soul inside of us has the same house no matter where we are. And all of these homes are very much alike: eyes, noses, mouths, long or short limbs. I was very glad of the thought, for it would be a solution if I found myself not wanting to go back where Van had once been.

I turned to Everett, riding placidly along, speaking to friends. "Have I changed much?"

He laughed and beat one hand into the palm

of the other. "That's great," he answered. "I thought I'd changed, too, after my half year down there. But I don't suppose I had. Nobody can change in half a year — I can't."

I knew that Everett would never change, and it was rather a sweet thought. I was relieved, too. If he couldn't see what I had been through, no one could. I had felt that the word "insulted" would be branded across my face. I have sometimes wished since that it was, for it would have set me apart. It would have explained why I must be different from the others. Now that the summer is over, I know that I am apart in spite of my trying. It will be my punishment, yet I can't imagine living any other way.

I knew it the minute Everett helped me out of the hack and I went up the straight walk to Mrs. Andrews. She kissed me on the lips before I could stop her, although I didn't know until she had kissed me that I should feel any need of stopping her. Then she looked at me. "You've got a lot of color, Melissa," she said.

I had. It came rushing over me after I had embraced her. There had been so many kisses on my lips since hers had last touched mine. The thought was revolting. But it didn't make me faint because Van's face had been close to mine. It was Mrs. Andrews' I resented. She would have been the injured one had she known. She would have considered herself made dirty and

would have scrubbed her face. Yet it was I who scrubbed my face when I reached my little old room. My lips were not for her.

It was a bad beginning for one who wanted to be like other people. But I moved about my room quietly, smoothed my hair, took out a clean handkerchief, and when Mrs. Andrews called I went down to sit opposite her at the table as I had done for many years. The side door was open and I could look on the back yard. It was green and lovely, although the garden was a vegetable one.

Mrs. Andrews poured the tea and I served the veal loaf. This was what every one else was doing in all the other houses. We passed and repassed the crab apple jelly. I broke off fragments of bread, but she spread the whole slice at once before she began her attack upon it.

She looked over at me. "I guess you're glad to get back and see your beau again," she said slyly.

I went on eating my veal loaf as every one was doing. But there was no use in feeling, or trying to feel like the girls in New Washington. The difference was that their sweethearts were here, and — of course, I didn't have one.

II

At first there were picnics and parties for me. I had to wear my thin dresses of last summer because I had chosen a wool crêpe for the graduating exercises. Mrs. Andrews said: "Land sakes! Why didn't you get something suitable for New Washington?"

I had no answer for her. My thoughts are like my clothes. They are not suitable — not light enough for New Washington. I bought some fresh ribbons, using them on the gowns, and I tried to talk like the pink and blue bows, but nothing was in keeping. My real self was raging behind little bars of pale colored silk.

No one has guessed what is the matter. When one is in love, as a rule, she is very excited and goes to talk with her girl friends just as soon as she gets through with the house work. There is always a great deal to say and one can hardly go back to dinner. If the friend she is calling on lives along the route that the young man takes when he goes home at noon, it is quite impossible to leave until he is seen coming down the street. One gets to know him a long ways off — by the swing of his shoulders, or the color of his blazer.

It is the custom here to count tips, and the hundredth man who tips his hat to your bow is the man you are going to marry. A girl has been known to cut a deacon dead when she has received the ninety-ninth tip, although there is always a good chance that the deacon won't lift his hat. It is absolutely dangerous, however, to meet the minister, who is, of course, very polite. I didn't count tips this year for fear they would arrange it for Everett to be the hundredth man, but I helped the others all I could to get the right ones. I knew just how vital it must have seemed to them. I drove Lucy Beck all around the town one day with her eyes shut so that she could get the last tip from the right one. But just as I told her to open them, the young man took off his hat and was fanning himself with it when she bowed. We decided that it counted just the same, and Lucy said that it was fate as he had been the hundredth man three times running.

A number of my friends have out-of-town admirers, but there, again, they are not like me, for they are continually expecting letters, and some times they receive them. Even if I intimated to the girls, so as to keep in with them, that there was some one in Boston whom I liked, they wouldn't believe it, or else they would feel sorry for me because I never get any letters. Fortunately I haven't expected any. It would be too hard to wait for the postman twice a day. It is only

within the last year that we have had a house to house delivery, and there was much opposition when the system was installed. Every one liked to go to the post office and wait around for the mail. Last year a number of boys from neighboring towns wrote me. It was delightful to know the clerks were sorting the mail, and to watch through the glass of our letter box to see if blue or white envelopes were being thrust in. Now, no one knows that you get a letter unless you tell about it or are on the next porch, although Lucy Beck pretends to get quantities that she doesn't.

I suppose I could pretend, but then I would have to "describe him," and I can't. I don't see him with right eyes any more, and often when I try I don't see him at all. When I am alone in the evening and am lying in the hammock, I try to imagine him there, and to picture his face above mine, but it is all a blur like a photograph when one moves. Again, when I least expect it — at the corner of Main Street, perhaps, or in the grocery store — his face is plain before me, just for an instant. I drop everything and stare, then it goes away.

Trying to see him so hard and thinking of him so much has led the crowd to believe that I am wrapped up in my work, and little by little, I find the parties going on without me, especially when they are couple affairs. It humiliates Mrs. An-

draws. I am afraid I'm not very much fun, so I can't blame them.

Lucy Beck told me plainly that her brother had just "given up." It was a very black night and he was driving me home in his buggy from the lake. I was telling him what I could about Boston without horrifying him, and of course he wasn't listening because it was time to begin to put his arm around my waist. The arm stole on just as regular as a clock doing its duty. I wondered if I couldn't pretend it was Van, for it was very dark, but at last when it was clear around me, so satisfied and sure, and just where it ought to be, I screamed out: "Take away your arm!" It even scared the horse.

I wasn't angry with Winky Beck, though of course I could never explain, but I was crazy with New Washington. Crazy with all this mean spooning which breaks down the barriers of right and wrong. It is so easy after that to go on to serious loving until — well, until one goes home from Cambridge, without a place in the world. Too unclean for one's girl friends, and too clean for the other kind.

III

BUT Mrs. Andrews began to feel less ashamed of me when she heard that some of the townspeople didn't believe it was interest in my work at all, that was keeping me so to myself. The one who said I was no longer a child and that I filled out the street declared you can't change human nature, and again she was wonderfully right. What she doesn't know is that human nature can change *you*, especially if you grow to be a woman quickly and fill out the street.

Many of the townspeople think that I am "setting my cap" for Everett. It seems to be more honorable to set my cap for a kind fat boy than to be immersed in my studies. Mrs. Andrews enters into these controversies impartially, as she tells them. But she combats that I am running after him, and points out that I never go into the store to ask the price of spades and lawn mowers as do other girls, because I don't have to, she tells them *impartially*, as Everett comes to see me. "She doesn't even sit out in front of the store on band concert nights although there are chairs," she always adds. It has been a great trial to her that I haven't sat on the chairs.

The other evening she was very cross with me because I had walked to the end of the pavement — and beyond it — so that he missed me when he called on his night off from the store. I am almost happy when I go beyond the pavement now, and not afraid. That night while sitting in the moonlight, remote from the town, I suddenly realized why this made me happy. And that brought terror. I hurried back and found Mrs. Andrews at the gate.

“I was scared about you — and you missed Everett,” she scolded as we went up the straight path together. “You’ve only a few days more, it’s getting chilly, and you ought to be at home when he calls. He’ll think you’ve done it a’ purpose.”

I sat down on the front steps and she took the rocker which had been pulled out into the grass. “What if I don’t go back to Boston,” I hazarded.

“Don’t go back!” she exclaimed, not rocking at all. “With that tuition paid?”

“There are worse things than going back,” I mumbled, twisting my hands in an agony of embarrassment. I was near to talking of something that had to do with men and women, and I was like New Washington again.

She didn’t understand, and I could feel her alertness as she looked at me in the night. “If it’s on account of Everett I ain’t got a word to say agin it.” She calculated a minute. “Yes,

it will leave you with a little money, too. Old man Austen will feel it's a great waste, but, on the whole, it'd be the best thing for you. Are you goin' tuh take Everett?"

"No, I'm not," I cried wildly. "But we could keep boarders, and I could do the work. I'd try. I'd really try, and —"

The rocking commenced vigorously. "You keep boarders! You couldn't keep a fly. About dinner time you'd be sitting out there at the end of the block pavement with some fern for the table dyin' in your hands while you dreamt. It's dangerous for a young girl to go out there anyway. There's tramps, mebbe."

"Couldn't I try?" I asked again. "There — there are tramps in Boston, maybe."

She arose and began seesawing the rocker toward the house. "Come in t' bed, Melissa Robinson. The Hub of the Universe is full of policemen, an' you've paid your tuition. Now you've got t' use it up — if you don't take Everett."

"I won't take Everett," I answered doggedly.

She did not reply, and nothing more has been said. I've laughed over it a little since. There is something grim about Mrs. Andrews sending me back to live among all those irregular people when even I can see that I shouldn't go. But I shall not return to Mrs. Short's. I shall move into the Tremont Street boarding-house district

which is not affected by the students. I can room with a girl who is in my class. She is not my kind, but perhaps that is as well for her. She is anxious to get married and hopes to recite exclusively for church entertainments until some good man sees her. Theodora said once that she must be a natural gambler.

A happy feeling comes over me when I think of Theodora. She had to go to work immediately, and hastily seized a position as teacher of calisthenics to the deaf and dumb in a state institution. The pupils want to get up a dramatic club, she writes, but she fears her sense of humor will not stand the test. I am sure that her kindness will overcome that, however.

The man who cuts our grass is pulling my trunk down from the attic. It is scraping over my head now, and, of a sudden, with such a mixture of pleasure and pain that I can't tell which is which, I find that I want to go to Boston.

IV.

LEAVING home will be the same as when I left last winter, only there will not be so many down to the train to say, "Good-by, Missy — good-by, Melissa Robinson." This is the last night, and just as it was before Everett came to see me. He took a night off from the store, too, which meant a loss of money.

I was determined, when I saw him coming up the walk, that I shouldn't be irritated at any of his little ways. They aren't bad little ways, and I would probably think them delightful if some one I loved employed them. As he came along, he whistled for me, the kind that requires an answer, and when I whistled back, he laughed complacently. It was as though my answer made me part of him.

I was wrapped up in a shawl in the hammock under the big tree and as I extended my hand he took it practically, as one takes oatmeal in the morning. Everett is never a lover every moment. He begins when it is time and leaves off when it is time. It was not yet the beginning, so his hand was warm, but limp.

He found a chair nearby and instead of pulling

it over to the hammock, he half sat in it, and then began scooting toward me with his hands on either arm. It was unbeautiful.

"Didn't see you at the ball game," he began.

"I wasn't there."

"If I'd known none of the fellows had asked you to go, I'd have taken you," he said gallantly.

"I didn't want to go," I retorted. I hadn't wanted to go, yet I was humiliated at not being asked by some young man whom I wouldn't have been happy with.

"You should always let me know, Missy," he pursued, "when you haven't any one to take you places. I'll get away from the store somehow. If you only had a telephone I would have asked you to-day. I couldn't get away until the last moment."

I felt out of it because we hadn't a telephone. "We can't afford such luxuries, but it doesn't make any difference since I'm going to-morrow."

"Going to-morrow, eh?"

"Why, you know I am, Everett!"

"Yes, I know you're set on it."

We could go on like this forever, and we did so for an hour. I kept it up, too, but all the while I was wondering if it would do to tell him something of my boarding-house experiences in Boston. No one has ever asked me about this and I have asked no one. I hadn't wanted to get

advice after I found myself comfortable. For the first time I longed to have someone help me, to have someone tell me that it hadn't been my fault, and to "take me in hand." I dreaded to do it all over again alone. I cleared my throat a number of times.

"Got a cold?" he asked.

"No; I was thinking," I started. He exclaimed over anything so alarming, which was the humor of our crowd, and I waited. "I'm not going back to my old boarding place," I finally said. "I'm going over in the Tremont Street district."

He was alarmed. "Oh, I wouldn't do that. That's a long ways from the Back Bay." This was curious in him. The conventional tone of his family crept into his voice.

"Columbus Avenue isn't the Back Bay."

"No, but it's just across the bridge, isn't it?" He evidently knew little of the nature of the locality.

"Tremont Street is respectable anyway."

He still fidgeted. "But your friends? How on earth, for instance, could Mr. Ruyne go over there to see you!"

I set up in the hammock, straight and angry. "I don't owe anything to Mr. Ruyne."

"Well, he's been very polite to you, you've said so."

I pressed my lips together. I was finding it

impossible to make any confidences. I was, like Everett, becoming more Yankee every minute. He was, by instinct, fearful of appearances, of the mere outside. The knowledge of real danger he did not grasp, nor would he speak of it. That would not have been nice.

"I can't consider Mr. Ruyme," I continued stubbornly.

He scooted the chair even closer to me for he didn't want the lodgers to hear. "And just by the way, Missy, you've never talked of Mr. Ruyme, although at first he took you to the theater. I don't believe you appreciate what it means to be taken out by a man like that. And now you want to change your boarding place and go way off in a district that people like him probably laugh at. I'm disappointed in you."

"Why?"

"Because I don't believe you're improving in your tastes. You've been awfully funny all summer, you seem uneasy before the people here. It seems sometimes that you're — you're —"

"Not up to them?"

"I wasn't going to say that exactly because you come of the best family in the county. But if you really want to go over in the Tremont Street boarding houses among the clerks, it must be because you no longer feel at home among people like us."

"Everett Austen!" I was out of the hammock stamping my feet.

"Ssh!" he warned, glancing toward the house.

"I want you to go straight home and stay there. I was about to tell you something that might have made a man of you, but I'm glad I didn't. It would probably only have made a gossip—a gossip among people who are too good for me. You can't help it. I'd have been the same way perhaps. It took a half year on Columbus Avenue to give me compassion—I wouldn't have found it in the Back Bay. Some day, when you're an old man and can trust yourself, go down to the city and inquire about Columbus Avenue which is just across the bridge from Huntington. Do that, Everett."

"Haven't you been living in a good locality?"

I laughed. "Come down and see how a student lives on six dollars a week!"

"Is that the reason Mr. Ruyne stopped coming to see you?"

"How do you know he stopped?"

"Because you never mention his name. I know the signs."

As I looked over at him pityingly he seemed all fat, fat clear through. The shrewdness of his nature had suddenly died, not to be revived until dollars and cents were mentioned again. The fat dissolved my anger. It was this boy, this strange instrument, who had sent me to Bos-

ton, who had sent me to Van. In his stupidity he had insulted me but I could never hate him. For I would not give one hour of the misery he has brought me in exchange for any other hour that held not Van.

"I don't suppose I'll see him any more, Everett," I said gently. "As I told you, he has gone to Europe. So don't bother. And I'm moving over to Tremont Street because it's respectable and cheap. I was with Jennie Daly at the last place anyway—but I've decided that I don't want to talk about it."

The curiosity of his race tortured him, but the fear of revelations that men and women shouldn't discuss openly kept him from questioning me. He arose awkwardly and endeavored to pull me down into the hammock with him. "Can't I sit with you?" he asked.

He was, relatively, like other men. He wanted to make amends for crushing me by being as nice as he knew how. He mumbled an apology, but he shared the general belief of men that to move from one passion to another was the best way of showing his regret. As he sank down his weight sent me flying up on one side. We were ridiculously hunched in, and very silent. I felt his heart beginning to beat quickly, and then his breath grow spasmodic. Finally he spoke:

"Why don't we get married, Missy?"

"Would you marry a girl that wasn't up to the standard of your town?" It didn't take long for me to say *that*.

His voice was heavy with the weight of the occasion. He was bewildered. "That doesn't seem to make any difference. I never thought of that before — funny!" Poor Everett! so like a human being with all his New England repression! "Besides," he continued huskily, "it would be all right as soon as we got married."

I wanted to laugh. "I couldn't, Everett. I'm much obliged, but I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I don't love you."

"You would get over that after being around me awhile."

"It wouldn't be fair to you. There are lots of girls who would be glad to marry you."

"It's queer, but you never want those."

I did laugh this time — forlornly. He was not only like other men, he was like me.

"Don't make fun. Let's be engaged." He tried to get his arm up to me on my perch as a further inducement. I slipped from the hammock and stood upon my feet. I moved away so that I could lift my arms and touch nothing. I stretched miles.

"I couldn't live in New Washington ever again, Everett."

The hammock heaved as he sought to gain

his balance. "Couldn't live in New Washington!" he echoed, in hurt astonishment.

I didn't answer, unless the sureness of my conviction reached him. I was very sure. It was as though the sky was full of light. Now I know why I walk alone among my old friends. I have no sweetheart here, nor anywhere. But I am a young woman and that doesn't matter. I have no future, but that will come. I have some days to look back upon but they will be erased by some other days. What I have and what will remain with me never to leave is the consciousness of another environment. Not a good or a beautiful one, made from mean streets and peopled with dingy lives, but the environment first made dear to me by Van. It has to do with the open country, far, far beyond the end of the pavement. It has to do with life.

Everett talked on for a long time. He urged me to walk in his paths, to keep in step with him; he gave reasons for my doing this. But his voice was like a tiny trumpet of tin that played no martial air. I answered him, yet did not listen, for I was marching on to invisible music that beat in unison with the throb of the world.

V

I AM at Mrs. Short's! I share my old room with Theodora, who is to come in from the institution for Saturday and Sunday. Of course I pay the most. I am to take my meals with Mrs. Short and Jimmy in the clean kitchen. So that is the usual way my planning turns out, and, as usual, it has turned out as I must have wished it.

It grew very cold in the night on the way down, but I was shy about ringing for blankets. This annoyed me because I thought I was quite a woman of the world, having traveled more than I had the year before, and had eaten in restaurants, but still I was ashamed to ring. In the morning my chest was all drawn together, and when I drew a breath I took only what was necessary. Just as we were late before so we were this time, only later. We had almost run into a train that was already derailed. It would seem that I should not go to Boston. In the afternoon my head grew very hot, and I slept a little. I always dreamed that I saw Van, and that he was throwing knives into my breast. I remember that I was glad to see him, even though each time I knew he was going to throw the knives. I tried

to go to sleep and dream the hurting over again, for I realized now that I shall only see him in my dreams. All the time I was in Boston last winter we never met on the street. And everything was on my side, too, last winter.

When I reached the city I knew just what to do. I crawled to the herdics and gave the Tremont Street address where the marriageable girl lived. The neighborhood was very somber and wet. The boarding houses had not yet begun to fill up. Indeed, they never do. Appeals to rent rooms are in all the windows like plague flags.

There was no light in my place when I rang the bell, but after a great hollow clanging, an anxious landlady appeared with a candle. She said, owing to a mistake, the gas had been turned off but there would be light in the morning. My acquaintance hadn't arrived yet, and the landlady couldn't let me have a large square room, even for the night, unless I paid the full price, but I could have a hall bedroom, "a very nice hall bedroom and no one would suspect it." She meant the same old sitting-room appearance.

I was pretty tired. I said I would rather have it like a bedroom just then. She said she hoped I wasn't going to be sick — last year she had had to send away a diphtheria case — "from out this very escritoire — which is a bed." We were in the little room, things coming down and being other things every minute. The odor of in-

secticide was overpowering, the rain beat against the window, the candle dripped on me.

I asked for some tea, but the landlady said they didn't serve meals in the house. She would go down and get me a towel, however. I lay down on the *escritoire* which had just become a bed. Every part of me ached and the knives were there always. But Van wasn't throwing them.

And yet he was in real life, only I couldn't see him as plainly as in my dream. He would always be throwing them. I closed my eyes and pictured him at a well-filled table in his pleasant room. He must be back from Europe by this time. And Mrs. Short and Jimmy were having dinner in the kitchen.

With the school not yet opened and Theodora among the deaf mutes, Mrs. Short's image was the only one in Boston that advanced to meet me with any degree of warmth.

Pain rolled up and engulfed me for a moment, then the heat increased. And they sent away the girl who had been ill of diphtheria in this very *escritoire*! I laughed to myself—I should have said *on* this very *escritoire*, I corrected, or *in* this bed. Then I became terrified again, thinking of the sending away. I arose from the bed, and, seizing my bag, felt my way through the gloom to the head of the stairs. The street light from the glass of the front door illumined

my path down. I tiptoed like a thief. When I reached the last step a faint ray was climbing upward from the basement steps. It was the landlady with the towel. In a panic I flew to the front door, opened and closed it gently, and hurried along the street as rapidly as my short breath would permit.

I walked until I found a cab, but I was quite wet by then. When we reached the house I sat on the front steps while the cabby rang the bell. I cried when I saw Mrs. Short, but I don't remember much except the doctor, and hot things that Jimmy kept going on a gas-stove — and Mrs. Short wore her clean wrapper all night. Whenever I awoke I could see the globe throwing colors on the wall. So the world was going on just the same.

VI

By the time all of the girls were back and the school was in full swing, I was able to ride down in the car. I always watched out of the window — after I looked through the car — for Van, and I held my breath when we turned the corners. It kept my heart beating pleasurably and sadly at once. I found the same enjoyment in the smell of the beautiful falling leaves.

I was glad it was more pleasure than pain, for that is to be my future life. Theodora and I have decided it. She came up from the institution the first day I was able to be around and gave me a lecture on being happy.

"You seem to think," she said, "that you can't have a good time at all, because the thing you want to have a good time over is not in your life. Did it ever occur to you that there are a number of other ways of enjoying yourself? That there are a number of other men, for that matter?"

"No, no," I cried. The thought of men, all alike, "all demonstrating on the same plane," as they say at school, made me sickish.

"Oh, yes, there are, and the only way to for-

get one man is to take an interest in some others. I'd say 'one other' except that it wouldn't do for you. Having driven out one nail with the second you'd find the second one making you so much more miserable than the first that you'd be hustling around with the hammer to drive number one into his place."

I laughed out loud.

"There!" said she. "Why don't you laugh like that oftener? You ought to find enough to amuse you in this house if I can scarcely control myself in a deaf and dumb institution. Don't creep around with your eyes shut. Look at the inmates, and smile."

"I think these women are tragic."

"Do you? Well, they wouldn't thank you for it. They can get more pleasure out of crying 'because Charley is late' than you would out of a whole evening with that beloved heavy swell of yours."

"He isn't mine any more."

"And a good job, too. There are others, my dear. Now I've met some of the officials who have to do with our asylum — lovely word, asylum — men who hold office here, and some day I'm going to introduce you to them. They know the world, too, although they don't speak French to an Irish housemaid when she lets them in. They're men with a punch, and, being sturdy, they'd take to just such a little harebell as you."

"Van doesn't like — ah, I forgot. It's finished."

Theodora flared again. "And that's another thing you've got to grasp and grapple with: it isn't finished."

I drew in my breath quickly. She misunderstood me, and hurried on. "I'm not through. I don't know what's happened, and don't tell me. But I don't think enough has happened, yet, to make him give you up. It's when they shouldn't that they do, you know."

I rose to my feet. I was Hercules. I disregarded everything else she had said. "Theodora, do you really think that — do you think he'll come to see me?" There wasn't any hiding it. At the possibility I was glad, glad, glad. That's why I had wanted to go to Boston.

For almost ten seconds she was aghast. Then she went at me again. "You're in bad, Missy. The thing for you to do is to get some fighting strength, and then to begin to laugh. Next Saturday week I'm invited to lunch at the Tavern 'and to bring a friend along.' You're the friend."

"It's your way, Theodora, but it won't work with me."

"It's *a* way — will you try it?"

"Yes," I promised. I, too, was aghast over being glad at the prospect of seeing Van. I would try anything.

Mrs. Short came in with some beef tea. She had time to be kind although she was cleaning up Gracia's room for a newcomer. Gracia was up in the country, very content with the baby.

"It's a lovely room, the first flight rear," sighed Mrs. Short. "I wish I could afford it."

"Yes," sympathized Theodora. "It must be tiresome going next door every night."

I was about to murmur responsively but to my amazement they both chuckled.

"Laugh too, Missy," said Theodora, after she had gone out. "You see, you're 'in the know,' now she's taken you in."

"I don't see anything to laugh at," I retorted, sipping my tea.

"You're sufficient," she said, dryly, as she rose to put on her wraps. "But apart from you, isn't there anything funny in that woman saying farewell, and slamming the front door every night of her life, when no one believes her?"

"Then she doesn't go?" I asked.

"No, lamb, she doesn't."

I was still very unsmiling although I understood. "And a white-haired woman!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," said Theodora, starting toward the door, "and you'll be white-haired, too, before you're through unless you begin to philosophize."

I cried out in agony, "Oh, no, Theodora; oh

please God, no; surely someone will take hold of me by then!"

She came back and put her arms around me for a moment. "I hope so, darling, I hope so. In the meantime, just grin and don't you care."

I was very conscious when I went down to dinner that night. But Jimmy and Mrs. Short were as ordinary as ever. The room next to mine is being fixed up for an old friend of hers who has been out West. She is Mercy Merrick. Years ago she roomed here, and then—"my dear," to quote Mrs. Short, "she met a very nice gentleman from the West, and business took her out there."

"Is that his name?" asked Jimmy. "'Business?'"

We both gave evidence of appreciating that, and I realized again that I was "let in on the know." At least I laughed.

VII

IT is still a long ways off from the luncheon party. Although I go to school each day, I can't do any active work, so I can't help thinking of what I shouldn't have any interest in. It horrifies me that I don't care much about beginning my dancing. I sit and wriggle my wrists and ankles to keep them supple, but I'm glad when it's time to go home, and I can watch from the car window again.

All the while I am at the house I try very hard to laugh. I find a good way to be amused is to amuse other people, so I tell Mrs. Short and Jimmy and Miss Merrick all about the school, and give them imitations of us at our worst. It seems to be bad faith in me to do this, a part of me walks away and looks reproachful, but it brings the four of us in the kitchen closer together somehow. I sit in the rocker by the range, very home-like, and they go on talking of the affairs of the house. It is always about the house.

Miss Merrick doesn't say much, but when you are talking to her you feel that she would rather listen to you than to anyone else in the world. Although you'd tell her anything at all about her-

self, you wouldn't think of asking her any questions. She is low voiced and gentle, but she seems to speak through veils. I wonder what the veils are that separate us!

She had to come back to Boston for her health. She coughs a good deal toward morning. Her skin is very fair and transparent. And her big diamond earrings pull down the ears. Her hair is short, mouse colored and curly. She always comes to her meals carrying a black bag. She said once she hoped the bag wouldn't wear out before the contents did. Her clothes are made over in a very poor fashion from old silks. "Nothing new for years," she told Mrs. Short once.

"I'm glad you held on to all your diamonds, Merrick," Mrs. Short has said a number of times. "They're just so much money." She always speaks of that in a relieved voice.

And, "There will be enough to last," Miss Merrick always replies simply.

Last night she played on the piano and sang very quietly.

" But oh, but oh, I dread the day —
The day when you'll forget me,"

came floating up as I sat in the big chair looking out. It wasn't a noble song but I cried, and then, very much ashamed, tried to find something amusing in life.

After a little the front door banged, and Mrs. Belstone came in sobbing out that she couldn't find Mark. That was funny, in a way, for last year she couldn't find Matthew. She is always planning to go on a trip to New York, and then has to come back because she hasn't been met at the station.

Miss Merrick came out of the parlor to quiet her before Mrs. Short, who was downstairs, could hear. She knows our landlady's regard for etiquette. "It's just a misunderstanding," she soothed.

"Yes," snuffled poor Mrs. Belstone, "but last year Matthew treated me the same way."

"That may be so," responded Miss Merrick brightly, "but think of Luke and John ahead of you."

She didn't comprehend, but went on up to her room — three flights rear. Next to her was Miss Cherry doing some extra embroidering for her shop, and they would have been such company for each other, but they never speak. All of them spend hours alone, but each feels she is too good for the other.

Of course, Mrs. Edson, wife of the traveling man, is really better than the rest. The wife of the traveling man? — I wonder if I am wrong about her. And if I am, is it funny?

VIII

VAN has come to see me! There is a great deal to be said before I get to this but I must put it down: Van has come to see me! Van has come to see me!

All the things that happened on that day seem foolish now, but they were momentous then. I was scared when the time came to go to the luncheon, but I was glad that I had kept it so prominently in my mind. Every now and then through the week, with a start like the waking up from a doze, I realized that I had been thinking of the party for a minute or so, and not of Van. It was most encouraging.

Things have not been very engrossing in the house although Mrs. Short has been eaten up with interest in the lady and daughter who have taken the room back of the parlor. She rolls the words "mother and daughter" on her tongue as though the respectable sound gave tone to her establishment. I feel a little out of it — the "young lady students" have always been her boast before.

The mother is Mrs. Reed, and the girl is Pearl. One is of a slippery plainness, and the other is of

a slippery prettiness. They have no good common sense. The mother goes in for cults, and the daughter is a public entertainer. She sings, they say, and is allowed the piano for an hour every day to practice, but if Mrs. Reed is out at that hour, Pearl doesn't sing at all — which no one minds.

I wish I could like them better. I have to talk to myself about it, and once I talked to Miss Mercy; I call her Miss Mercy now, having been invited.

"I suppose it's jealousy," I ended, "because the Pearl girl goes out in the evening and makes so much money giving entertainments. I need money a great deal because the doctor says I must sleep alone to keep my strength, and I must have good food, so it's going to be pretty hard for me unless I can earn a little extra."

"Well, perhaps," returned Miss Mercy, lingering on her words, "perhaps you don't entertain in the same way that she does."

"No, I don't," I admitted. "I can recite pretty well, and I can dance quite well, but I can't sing at all — just hum."

"I hear you in your room, sometimes," she said kindly; "I thought your voice was charming."

I was pleased and pink. "Oh, that's just to practice my dance steps. I should like to sing and recite well enough to assist in concerts. The president sends the other girls to entertainments,

but he doesn't want me to go. He wants to launch me properly — at least that is what he says."

"That is really a compliment."

"Oh, I don't know. I am kept on humdrum steps. I feel some days that they are deceiving me, just for my tuition. I pray to die then."

She gave my hand a little squeeze. "You are the real artist. But go on — don't stop — don't ever stop. I stopped — well, it's a great mistake."

I wanted to ask more of that, but there were the veils about her face. "I suppose," I inquired as I was leaving the room, "I could stop long enough to go to a party." This was the Saturday morning of the luncheon.

"I suppose so," she smiled, "but parties won't take the place of anything big."

"Oh, don't say that," I cried in alarm.

"Try them," she answered.

I went into my room and put on my cream wool crêpe so as to start as well as possible. I made myself do it. It had been bought for the theater with Van, and I had worn it that last night. It was his — I felt him in the room. I pretended it was he clumsily fastening up the hooks and eyes as I myself was struggling with them at the back. When Theodora came in suddenly, I almost screamed.

As soon as she arrives, any conditions in the house that seem unhealthy, become perfectly nor-

mal, and any protest of mine sounds like a little dog yapping at a universal law. Whereas Jennie deplored evil, but felt herself invulnerable to it, Theodora accepts it along with eating and drinking, and sitting down and getting up. Her sense of enjoyment is so tremendous that she can't limit herself to what most people would care for.

This morning, in view of the luncheon, she was quite cold to the advent of Mrs. Reed and Pearl. Otherwise her hair would have been wild with excitement over the prospect of having a mother in the house.

"The old lady goes in for various cults, you say, Missy — I'm going to lap this belt and pin it, you've grown so thin — I suppose she hasn't sense enough to know where she is."

"It's hard on her daughter." I was trying to defend the creepy one.

"And her name is Pearl? Stand still — I shan't stick you again. Well, you needn't worry over anybody with that name. What does she do?"

"She entertains by singing."

"Oh, help!"

That depressed me. "I was going to ask you if I should sing to-day. That is, if there is a piano in the room. Just foolish songs, you know."

"Fine! We'll all join in after lunch. It won't matter how bad it is then."

We shook with joy. I can laugh at things like that.

We went down in the car and walked up Washington Street until we came to a little narrow alley which Theodora suddenly pushed me into. At the end was a good-looking hotel, and polite servants.

"This is the place where everybody eats and nobody talks about," she said, and then, very importantly, to the correct door man: "Mr. Rafferty's party?" And we were shown into a private room immediately.

It was quite large, with a piano and easy chairs, and a beautifully set table in the center. At a sort of buffet two men were looking over some plans. They came forward to shake hands with "Miss Theo," as they called her, and then with me. After that they rubbed their hands together for a little, not embarrassed, but waiting for something to happen.

I knew unless I began talking right away I should never speak at all, so I remarked to the portly, black-haired man whom they called "Senator," that it was funny to have such a nice hotel in such a bad neighborhood. Then I was afraid he would be offended, so I added hurriedly that, of course, mine was much worse.

"Oh, the Tavern knows the advantage of hiding," he answered. His voice rose and fell in sweeping cadences. He looked over me as though

always in the habit of speaking to more than one.
"And where do you live, Miss Robinson?"

"I live on Columbus Avenue," I was ashamed of my address.

"Hm, ah, yes. The car service is very good on that street"—doing the best he could for me—"as I have often told the Senate, that is the value of these short franchises."

I explained that we students had to live there because it was cheap. We didn't enjoy living so homelessly.

"We'll fix that some day," he announced loudly to the hotel. "There should be clubs for the girl students in Boston—good motherly clubs. They do it in Paris—they do it in Paris, my wife tells me."

I was astonished that he was married, but it didn't seem to trouble him. I looked at the places at the table. There were five.

"All here but Rafferty," he rumbled, following my eyes. "As usual, the host shows up at the last gasp."

"Ah, well," broke in the pleasant, deliberate voice of the Judge, a tall, thin man with gray hair. He took off his glasses when he spoke, and snapped them on again when he had finished. "It doesn't matter just as long as he's on hand when the bill comes in."

A voice broke in on us. "And a fine way to be talkin' of the one who gave yu yer jobs."

We all turned from the plans toward which we had drifted to welcome a thick-necked, keen-eyed, slouchy man with red hair turning gray. "Hello, Boss," and "Hello, Rafferty," came from the men. Theodora said, "Hello, Chief," and led me over to him.

He didn't come to me nor did he take his hat off immediately. "Miss Melissa Robinson," he repeated after her, shaking my hand up and down. "Excuse a laboring man for being late at his own shindig. These sons of guns get no apology."

The Senator and the Judge didn't care. Theodora said she had been crying her heart out over him. "Devil a tear from you," he answered her, pitching his hat and coat at the attendant, "but you'll get a cocktail for the pretty speech."

A waiter had come in with a tray of them. There were two apiece. "Bless me," said the Judge, snapping off his glasses, "this looks like a Maine drug store behind the prescription counter. Come one, come all."

"I don't think I'd better," I said.

Rafferty lowered his first glass which he had already drained. "Good," he approved. "We let Theodora here have one, because she's part of the gang, but it always makes me mad when my wife takes 'em."

"Are you married, too?" I cried out.

Only Theodora understood the despair in my

voice. The men thought it was a compliment to Mr. Rafferty, and "Ah-haad!" loudly.

"We are all married, Miss Robinson," orated the Senator, "all married men, and for that reason we have to slip up an alley now and then for a little quiet talk. Isn't that fair?"

I thought about it with my head on one side. "It's fair to the wives," I decided. I was really trying to justify myself.

The Judge and the Senator gave each other pokes in the side, and Mr. Rafferty began piling the divan cushions on one of the dining chairs. "We've got one of those infant terribles among us," he was shouting. "Lift her up in the high chair, and mind what you say before her, gentlemen."

I could see that this amused him. He was enjoying what appeared to be an impertinence from a girl he had never seen before, and at the same time he was keeping at bay, with a certain dignity, those two men who held fine positions in the eyes of the world. I decided that I liked it, though.

As the luncheon proceeded they felt no necessity for small talk. They ate in silence when they felt like it, and when something occurred to them they spoke. Every now and then one of them would sigh and say: "This is what I call cutting loose." All sorts of subjects came up. They listened to Theodora's criticisms of certain methods at the institution, and laughed tolerantly when

I gave an imitation of Pearl practising for the entertainments. Then they would drop into politics, which kept Theodora and me silent. Mr. Rafferty grew ugly once.

"I'll smash 'em," he said; "I'll break every-mother's son of 'em. When I get through they won't have a rag to their sneakin' backs." He caught me looking at him rather round-eyed. "Unless," he added, "you hold up your little finger to save 'em, Miss Missy."

I held up my little finger immediately. He leaned over and kissed it with a smacking sound. It was awkwardly done, but they all seemed gratified with his gallantry. I wished he hadn't. Theodora would have managed; she would have held up her little finger and pulled it away before his lips touched it. She has just as much fun as she wants but no one takes liberties with her.

"It is at the Tavern, Miss Robinson," said the Senator, thinking it time to explain conditions, "that generals are made, armies are mobilized, and battles are won."

"Do you hear him," groaned Rafferty; "always talkin' as though he was hangin' over the tail end of a wagon election eve."

"It is at the Tavern," said the Judge rather gravely, teetering his glasses, "that what is heard is forgotten."

Mr. Rafferty continued flippant, "That's a

judicial warning, ladies." He deposited some chocolate sauce where I didn't want it. "That's the joy of being out with little girls like these. They don't know what we're talkin' about — and they don't care."

"I don't care for anything in this world at present," said Theodora, finishing her dessert, "but this cake."

"And I don't care for anything in this world —" I started, but then I couldn't go on and be polite."

The Boss leaned over again. "I'll complete it for you, 'but for Rafferty!' Say it, Miss Missy."

We were pushing back our chairs and the conversation was general. I shook my head defiantly.

"I'll make you say it some day," he whispered.

"Oh, no, you won't," I answered coolly.

I walked over to the piano and sat down. How wonderful it was that I could say just what I wished before a big man called the Boss, when I was so stumbling and tongue-tied before Van.

The men went at the plans again, which were outlines of an underground railway, and I played a little. Then Theodora and I drifted into popular songs. One was about Rafferty although I had never known he was a real person before. He was delighted. He offered five-dollar bills to both of us, Theodora took hers, and I handed

mine back. He grew red and put it on the coal fire. The other men pretended not to have noticed. It was terrible to see five dollars burning up.

He was smiling again in a minute. The three politicians stretched out in easy chairs, sometimes joining in the chorus with us. "Ain't this great," ran repeatedly among them. I didn't think it was so awfully great, but it was killing the day.

"You couldn't dance if I played for you, could you, Missy?" asked Theodora, who was bound to show me off.

"Say, are you a dancer, too?" burst out the Chief.

"Yes, I am," I replied, "but I shan't dance to-day." I felt the old conscious misery of appearing before people with eyes staring at me.

"The next time, perhaps, we'll have the dance," suggested the Judge.

"Is there going to be a next time?" I asked. On the whole I was rather glad.

The Boss arose decisively. "You bet — and next Saturday. There's always going to be a 'next' if there's been a 'time.'"

Theodora ordered me straight home to lie down while she went off with the Judge to buy some literature for the Institution. Or rather, she went on ahead, and he was to meet her in the book store — quite by accident. The Senator left

to go into the hotel lobby, and Mr. Rafferty and I were alone.

"He hasn't made a speech for two hours and it's tellin' on him," he explained as he held my coat upside down.

"Shall I go out by myself, too?" I asked.

He eyed me keenly. "You poor, pitiful little thing, that's so brave and saucy. You go out with me, and I'll knock down the first man that looks at us."

When we reached Washington Street he put me in a cab and paid the driver. He lifted his hat clumsily when he said good-by, and the pressure of his hand on mine made me scringe. But I liked the power of him. I liked my power over him.

I was about to lean back against the cushions contentedly when another thought brought me upright: "But this man is married! This man is married!" And just for one minute I had seen a way out of my misery.

I climbed to my room, bewildered by the new problem, bent over by it.

It was almost dusk. From the street I had seen that the globe was already going round. When I opened my door I found Van standing by the window with the colors falling upon him.

He swaggered toward me. I saw that it was a swagger, but I didn't care. I saw again that his face was cruel, but I didn't care. I backed against

the door, which closed it. What would he say to me about our last night together! How could he bridge the abyss that lay between us!

But he admitted no abyss. "Hello, dear," he greeted me; "I was delayed in Europe and have just returned. How are you?"

"I've been ill," I answered, staring up at him.

"Poor baby!" He stooped down and kissed me.

I lifted my arms and put them about his neck. I closed my eyes. Theodora was right, he was not yet through. He was cruel, merciless. But he was here, he was here, he was here.

IX

ALL the leaves are off the trees; before one turns a corner one must shrug up for the cold wind. There is no warmth in the sun when it shines, and Columbus Avenue is endless when I walk home from school.

But Columbus Avenue is not as long as are my evenings. I don't see much of the girls; I am friends with all of them, and they call me "baby," pet me — and leave me alone. For I am not a baby. My associations with Van have wrapped me about in a sort of cocoon of mystery which they feel but cannot penetrate. The open sinning of Gracia is more comprehensive to women — that can't long be a secret to lock in one's breast.

Besides, I am afraid to go out at night for fear I may miss Van. Last year I could take chances and never fail to be home, or at least to find him waiting. Now I do the waiting, but he doesn't come. I told him that I was to have the room alone except Saturdays and Sundays.

"That will be pleasant for you," he replied.

I tried to smile lightly. "It will be — if you come to see me."

He rested his pale gray eyes on me. He didn't seem to be looking; he was planning. "Of course. Expect me any evening."

So I began expecting him, feeling it would be Monday, since on Saturday he had first called. But it wasn't Monday, nor any other day, and three weeks have passed. If I sit down with the others in the basement, I am always listening for the clang of the bell. It is sharp down there, for it hangs in the hallway. Each time my heart jumps up with joy and then sinks again as Sarah clambers upstairs, creaks open the door — and the faint rumble of a strange voice asks for someone.

When I can't stand the agony of the sharp clang any longer I go to my room, where the sound is a muffled grief. Last year I never missed seeing him from the time he turned the corner at the pharmacy. He always came from the Back Bay where he dined at his club, except once when he drove up in a cab from the other direction, and was in the room before I knew it. Such laughing! I had forgotten all about that incident until the other night. I wish I had not remembered it. Now I listen for the sound of wheels coming up from down-town too.

At half past nine I go to bed, but last night even after the lights were out, the door bell rang, and I slipped into the hall to say to Mrs. Short

that I was up. She was cross about it, for she had already slammed the front door and gone to the neighbors. It was not for me anyway. It was a telegram for Mrs. Edson. "Not coming, I fear," she said as she ran down the stairs. She, too, had been listening in the hall.

This is not a House of Mirth, and Theodora cannot make it so. Mrs. Edson's husband is not a traveling man — nor is it funny. There is nothing at all funny about what happened last week when the door bell rang.

Mrs. Short and Sarah were getting the dinner ready and I said I would go upstairs to answer the bell. I wanted to, of course. I had a presentiment, but my presentiments are never right of late. It wasn't Van.

Instead, two little boys were on the steps. They were poorly dressed, with stumpy boots, and wool caps pulled down over their ears. Both were very wet from the heavy rain, but their faces were beaming.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said the younger one, "but could I speak to Nonie?"

"Nonie?" I was perplexed.

"Yes'm, the girl."

"Our girl is Sarah."

"No'm, I mean Nonie, Nonie Edson. I'm her brother."

"Yes'm. He's her brother," affirmed the other one eagerly.

"Oh," I laughed. "You mean Mrs. Edson. I didn't know her first name."

The little boy set his lips. "No'm. She ain't married. She came down from Nova Scotia, and when she got a place here, she wrote it back — just in case of sickness."

"On a postal card she wrote it," chanted the other.

"And her name is Edson?"

"Yes'm; I'm her brother, and this fellow's my friend. If it ain't too much trouble at supper time, could I see her?"

"I'm his friend," echoed the older little boy. "We've come down from Nova Scotia, as a surprise."

I looked into their bright faces until they grew misty in my eyes. I was trying to apply some of my dearly bought knowledge to this situation. "I'll go up and ask," I said to them. "I — if you don't mind waiting." I couldn't altogether close the door upon the little visitors. I dared not leave it open, fearing that they would hear me at Mrs. Edson's room.

"We don't mind waiting, thank you."

I almost shut them out, then flew up the stairs. Mr. Edson was in that night although it was not yet Saturday. The two were cooking something in a chafing dish. "The salt, Nonie, the salt," he was saying. When she answered my knock I beckoned her outside.

She came out, closing the door. Mr. Edson never liked to be stared at. "Yes, Miss Robinson," she asked blithely.

I put my finger on my lips too late to warn her. I held her hand while I whispered: "Is your own name Nonie Edson?"

She loosened her hand and snapped at my wrist. "Is there anything wrong at home?"

"There are two little boys downstairs to see you." With a groan she turned toward her room. I held her back. "One says he is your brother. You've got to see them."

By this time she was on her guard again. "I have no relatives. I can't see them. This will make my — my husband very angry."

"They've come down from Nova Scotia. You've got to see them."

"But, my God! Don't you see I can't?" In her distress her voice broke from its whispered bounds and rang out clearly. From below as if in answer to it came a cry from her brother.

"Nonie?"

In horror we stared from out the darkness, down into the lighted hall below. The boys were at the newel post, their unseeing eyes lifted up to us, who were hidden in the blackness. The door must have blown open, and, caught by a familiar accent, the lad had happily responded to it.

The silence was appalling. Again he called, but

doubt and bewilderment were in the childish wail:

"Nonie?"

"Go down," I mouthed imploringly.

She pulled herself away from me, and with a stifled, "God help us all," swept back into her room, and crashed the door shut. The air was sweet with the perfume of her lacey gown.

I went down the two flights. They were still standing — but no longer waiting. The mystery was too deep for their young minds. But she had passed them by.

"The lady, Mrs. Edson, says —" I stammered, "she says it's a mistake. Her name is Helen."

The little fellow looked at me simply. "She's my own sister," he replied.

"She's his own sister," the older little fellow echoed.

They turned, and clumped out into the wet night.

I couldn't tell Mrs. Short what had happened. She would hate it so. Late that night after I had let down the folding bed, which brings one side of it against the big doors between my room and the next, Miss Mercy came in.

She was terribly thin in her patched nightgown which had once been beautiful. A little shawl was around her. "I thought I heard suspicious sounds," she prefaced.

I denied them, sopping my eyes with the sheet.

"But if you sit down, I'll tell you." She sat down at the foot of the bed.

But my story did not surprise her, only she was very sorry. "He has taken her name, you see. He becomes Mr. Edson when he crosses the bridge to this side of the world."

"He lives in Boston then?"

"Oh, yes; I know of him. He has a family over by the river somewhere."

I sat up in bed. "A family — a wife?"

"Yes, God help her."

"The wife, you mean?"

She hesitated. "I mean them both: the woman and the wife. But mostly the woman. He'll go back to the other — they always do."

It seemed so strange to have Miss Mercy, with that name, on the bad side. "But Mrs. Edson has wronged the other," I pursued.

Miss Mercy coughed, and wrapped the little shawl closer around her. She spoke drearily. "Oh, yes, the woman has wronged the wife, and she is paying for it by the eternal fear that some day she will be left alone again."

"She wrote her people that she had gone into service. Perhaps she will — later."

She arose, sighing. "Not likely. She has learned the beauty of refinement, but more than that, she has learned to love. That is hard to do without. One need not be sorry for a spinster.

She tucked the coverlet about me. "But if one is One does not miss what one has never known." wise she will avoid the Benedicts in life. It spells sorrow for too many."

I caught her hand to detain her. "And the other women in this house — oh, Miss Mercy, tell me — are they all married men who come to see them?"

She stood in the dark by my bedside reflecting. "I seem to see an image of myself in you. You are learning as I did, but we must learn, I suppose, one way or the other. Are they all married? As it happens, I believe they are."

After she went back to her room the Boss kept recurring to my mind — Theodora's remedy for wiping out a menace! A married man is now sending me flowers. I look for the name on the box when it first comes but it is never from Van's florist. Then I take them to the girls at school.

I wonder if I make him suffer? As I fear Van, perhaps he fears me. He listens to me humbly when, at our luncheons, I find repeated fault with him. There are so many things he does wrong that I should have loved in Van! But I might not have known his clumsiness had I known no other manner.

I like his strength. Once he groaned under his breath: "Lord, and I could smash you with my fist!" And when he said it, I liked him better than I had before. Here was a man great enough

to kill me — and to shield me. With a sensation of pleasure I looked at his big hands, then, realizing the emotion, a wave of revulsion against myself swept over me. It seemed incredible that I, loving one man, could find a moment's stimulation in the brute power of another.

Why can't it be with me as with Theodora? She makes no instinctive individual selection, and no one takes her entirely for his own. She is happy with all of them, and cares for none. I find myself always for one — always for one in every gathering where there are men.

But that is my way, and I recognize it now. I don't care! It's me! Why can't I meet someone wiser than I, who wants to marry me? I want to be guarded and encircled, my old planning won't do. It must be a stronger chain than little daisy links made by schoolgirls' arms — I'm past that. And the man I have met who might help me is married already.

X

WHEN I finally wrote Van a note he answered it. But I listened for two days before it came. Listening is a new kind of torture. First I hear the postman's whistle and that doesn't always mean us, but when his feet shuffle on the steps I know we women waiting in the house are to suffer or to be glad. When the dull clap of the metal lid to the post box in the vestibule makes it even more certain, I go down. But I went down many times before I could see through the iron lattice work of the box, the gray green of his writing paper. I used to steal along for I was ashamed to be so often disappointed. Pearl was almost always looking, too, and she was seldom disappointed. When the note did come it was charming:

"Dearestie:

"I shall take pleasure in calling on a young lady who writes me that she is having some kind of an ache. For the life of me I can't make out whether it is of the heart or of the head, but it seems that I am needed. And we shall put our battered heads together and our battered hearts

together, shan't we, little love, and diagnose the case. Expect me soon.

"V. W. R."

For three days I hurried home after school and put on my pale blue cashmere, which has been made over into a pretty house dress, and each day Mrs. Short would say: "Expecting someone?" and Miss Mercy would reply: "Can't the child dress up for us?"

The second night I had been asked to go to the theater, or, rather, Rafferty sent me seats, which was his custom, but I gave them to Mrs. Short for fear of missing Van. But the fourth afternoon when a girl invited me to a concert from three to five, I accepted.

I was very angry with Van. I said to myself: Oh, this is too much — there must be no more of it — no more of this miserable groveling — no more of this wringing of my soul in the dark. I took deep breaths, long ones, through the first part of the concert. I felt emancipated. I was so glad to find that, all of a sudden, just by the making up of my mind vigorously I had put Van out of my life forever. I applied the test I had often made when I have tried to forget him: will you not want him even in the moonlight? I asked myself, and it seemed to me that even in the moonlight, when one should never be alone, I could shut him out.

But it was not a very good concert. Had it been better I would not have grown so nervous through the second part. My attention to it wavered. Old haunting pictures of that same moon came back to me; or I was by the window with my arm linked carelessly through Van's; I was dining at his table — rough tweed was against my cheek. The memories crowded up around me like prison bars.

Like bars! But that was what I had always wanted, I reminded myself. I had always felt the need of being cloistered — shut in. I had felt it more than ever since meeting men, married men for whom I do not care, but whom I find not entirely unattractive. I wanted to be sheltered — and Van alone could do it.

A new thought came to me: if I told Van all this, and asked him, for mercy's sake, to let me be sure that there is only one man in the world and he that one — would he respond to me? Would he take pride in my utter need of him and would it be sufficient for him to have the sure knowledge that my love saved me for him alone, if not for him entirely? Would he — would any man be great enough for that?

I said I was ill, and left the concert. I took the car, I never thought of the five cents; I was sick with the thought that I might miss him. The car was blocked near the house and I ran the rest of the way. I let myself in with my latch key

and rushed into my room. It was empty. I was weak with relief — and disappointment. I turned to the dressing table to remove my hat, and there, written boldly across the mirror with what must have been the soap for crayon, was the signature of "Ruyne."

I threw myself about the room, crashing into the furniture. I did not hold in at all. I cried aloud. It was too hard, too hard to bear. My wraps went into a heap on the floor and I followed them. I told it all to the faded roses in the carpet. They didn't care, they brightened up under my tears. After the storm was over I was dreadfully tired. I dragged myself over to the couch. I remembered the beginning of a last long sob, but I must have gone to sleep in the middle of it.

Silence, silence, silence, then the consciousness that a door had opened and closed — that I was very happy — something wonderful was against my face — the odor of cigarette smoke and a man's hair tonic mingled with my dreams, and after a sweet breathing in of it, slow-returning consciousness to the full realization that I had been sleeping with Van's head on the pillow beside mine, as he knelt by the couch.

I didn't let him know for a long time that I was awake, dreading that he might lift his head; and I should have gone on forever that way but I feared his body was so twisted in such a position that he might be uncomfortable. I turned and

smiled. I had still my plan to unfold — if I had the courage — but all the bitter words I had prepared during the waiting weeks were gone.

He arose to sit by my side, smoothing my dress and setting my sailor collar straight. Then he lighted a cigarette with his usual broad elaborate gestures. I think flamboyant would be the word for him. It was only last year that this sweeping manner was the most elegant in the world to me, now I know that he would be finer if he were simpler. I discover flaws in him but I keep on loving him. I almost wish I hadn't found anything wrong — there is a sort of shame in caring for a man who isn't quite — (oh, I must be mistaken when I say it) quite a gentleman.

And there is more than wrong — there is an alarm in it, for even as he is I must cling to him. One can't go as far as I have with a man, and pass on to others — that would be wanton. But how much luckier it would have been for me had I found a better man to love than Van.

As he sat by my side blowing cigarette smoke into my hair and nibbling at my fingers — all light things — the plan of throwing myself upon him for protection which seemed so natural at the concert was now very remote. It made my heart beat fast to think of it. He put his hand over the flutter of laces which my quickened pulse was stirring and raised his eyebrows whimsically.

"What's this commotion, Missy; your heart's going like a driven doe's."

I took his hand in both of mine and held it against my throat. "I've never been called a doe before."

"No? You've their coloring, even to your frightened eyes."

I reflected. "I don't think I ever saw a doe. Oh, yes," my mind traveled back over eons of days, happy and unhappy. "I saw that painting — do you remember where it was? — in the private dining-room the first night I ever had supper with you."

"I only saw you that night, sweetheart."

"The picture was a pack of hounds dragging down a doe."

He laughed. "That hotel has more humor than I imagined."

"You mean it was applicable?"

I was afraid after I had used the word that I had put the accent on the wrong syllable, and I had. He used it after me, pronouncing it as it should be, I suppose. My cheeks grew warm as they always did when he had corrected me, but I did not admire him for enlightening me that way. A year ago I admired him for that, as a dog licks the hand that beats him. I wonder if I shall see some day that it is only a passion which develops under ill treatment. Still at that mo-

ment his hand was against my throat and he was all I had.

"You say it can't refer to 'us,'" I continued after he had spoken. "Perhaps not to you, but to me — yes," I had decided to go on with it.

He withdrew his hand, fumbling for another cigarette and a match. "So you are pursued, eh? Don't you flatter yourself?"

I didn't reply to that. "Is the Boston Tavern a nice place to eat, Van?"

He put out the match with a whisk of his hand, threw the cigarette into the fireplace and folding his arms stared down at me coolly. "What do you know about the Boston Tavern?"

"I go there for luncheons — and dinners sometimes."

"With whom?"

"With a party."

"Always a party?"

"No. Of late alone — once or twice — Not alone exactly — with one other, I mean."

"Oh, yes, one of the 'hounds.' Well?"

"I don't want to go there."

"Then why do you?"

I hesitated. Should I tell him why? His voice was rough, but it was something else that I had never heard before: it was anxious. Was it because of the — of the other hound? Did he care? And did he care because he cared for me or was his vanity hurt? I had read of these things and had

seen them in plays. But my mind revolted at this miserable winning of one man by the flaunting of another. I seemed to see two pools before me in which to plunge; one was muddy, one was clear. No matter what the end, I must be honest with the man I love. I plunged into the clear one.

"Well! Why do you go?"

I turned over and buried my face in the pillow. I couldn't endure his merciless stare as, once more, I bared my heart to him.

He put his hand on my shoulder and shook me. "Well?"

"I go because I'm lonely — for you, Van."

"A-ah!" His sigh of satisfaction was a knell in my ears — vespers for my planning, matins for his. He once more had the upper hand. He deserved it, for he bore the cheap honor more easily than I.

"Tell me all about it, Missy."

My answer was unintelligible to him. "I can't hear you; wait." He lifted me in his arms, my head was again in the old place against his coat — my home. "Who are these men, Missy?"

"I can't tell you — it doesn't matter. They are powerful men, and one of them is a political boss."

"But my dear child, one can't love a boss."

"I'm lonely. I'm eaten up with it. Whenever a woman is lonely then is the time to be afraid."

He relaxed his arms to let me drop a little that he might look at me more completely. "Well, you're a cold-blooded proposition. You appear to contemplate his dragging you down — doe-like — with the utmost certainty. Why does he get what is denied me, why —"

"No, no, no, you don't understand!" I was clinging to him passionately. "Nothing will ever happen except the cheapening of my soul. I don't want to go to their parties. They are married men. The Boss is a married man. But I wait so long for you, and then they ask me, and I go that I may forget for a minute that you have ever lived. It's not right, and I know it, so to-day, at a concert, I had a plan —" I gasped — my mouth was dry. I prayed for words, that I might make it very plain how much I needed him.

He pressed his lips against my hair. "Go on, my girl, go on. Don't keep me waiting." He was softly tender — he was so sure.

"It was a plan — to ask you to come to see me — more often — just to be kind if it meant nothing else to you — just to be kind — and to help me through the last year of my schooling. I can manage somehow — when I get away from here — where it will not be so easy to do the wrong thing — where there will be more people doing the right thing. Will you see me through, Van, will you?"

I was shaking not with sobs, but with nerves.

He soothed me gently. His tone rang with that tender quality which he could always put on and off like a garment. "I'll be with you any night, dear heart, and every night, dear heart, and —" his voice sunk to a whisper but I caught the phrase.

I twisted myself free from him, and walked until I struck the opposite wall. My mouth was against it as I spoke. "I didn't mean that; oh, Van, I'm sorry, but I didn't mean that." I was terribly afraid of him just then.

He followed me over and pulled me around. "What are you outlining then? The same old tea party?"

I gripped his coat lapels for fear he would leave me. "Van, you must listen. It will — it is going —" I had no words — "Oh, Van, try to make it a sort of philanthropy. Yes, that is it, a sort of charity — even if it's hard — just for the rest of the year. Just think, it will be something that no man has ever done before — something wonderful — a man saving a woman from herself, and from himself. Oh, Van, try it. There isn't any other way. And all the time it will be because I love you so. You can keep thinking of that — so it will be unusual — and keep you interested. 'For after all,' you can say, 'no woman can care for me as she cares.' Oh, Van, try it."

It was some time before he began to laugh, but

he laughed a long time to make up for it. I was staring up at his large teeth. I knew before I had finished that I had lost. I knew it, I expect, before I begun. "Oh, God, let me hate him," passed through my mind.

He shook me loose and went over to the chair where he must have thrown his coat and hat when he came in the second time. "I should like to oblige you," he said, "but I'm just a miserable dog — like the rest of your friends. The Creator made me, and He gave me a certain amount of restraint, but He put a limitation on it — for a reason. I haven't been to see you, for our dissimilarity of opinions made it impossible. You may continue to coquette with nature if you wish. I don't wish."

"Then why did you come to see me this autumn?" I cried out in anguish. "I hadn't expected you!"

For the smallest part of an instant he hesitated. Then a dull red came into his face as he saw that I had scored ever so slightly. "I thought a picnic at New Washington might have revolutionized you," was his coarse reply.

"Oh, God, let me hate him," again swept through my mind, even as despair tore my body when he turned to the door.

But again he approached me. His caustic tone left him and once more he spoke in the rich deep note of the lover that he can put on and off.

“ Missy, I love you, and I want you, and I shall wait until you send for me. You will.”

Even after he had swaggered out, and I saw him swagger, the other side of me would have kept him a little bit longer had he cared to stay.

XI

Now that winter has come, Miss Merrick wears her sealskin coat. It is very old-fashioned and brown at the edges, but it was once handsome. "Two inches longer than his wife's," I heard her telling Mrs. Short, who admires it extravagantly. Try as Miss Mercy might, her voice was glad when she said that.

This talk of her coat seems unimportant, but I have found that everything in life is important, and the smallest happenings are our real tragedies. How different my school days would have been had Mrs. Croakes possessed a parlor. All the barriers of New Washington etiquette would have remained firm and supporting.

But I can't see how Miss Mercy's eyes could glisten over that, and, yet, after to-day —?

I was in Mr. Rafferty's office this afternoon. Since Van last flung himself out of my room, which was four weeks ago, I have seen the Boss at our married luncheons — as I call them — and a few times when the day was too black to endure I have accepted his urging to take tea with him, although taking tea is funny, for he orders every-

thing in the world to eat, fearing that I don't get enough at Mrs. Short's.

He asked me to come to his office that I might see the view from the top of the hill, and I had gone because it gave me a sense of importance to be admitted where so many vainly knock. I was quite afraid, at first, for there were lines of officials to pass, and each one turned upon me belligerently as I asked for their chief, then took the cigars out of their mouths when I mentioned my name and escorted me along.

I felt taller than usual and walked elegantly. The girl at the telephone desk turned around and smiled, and I nodded back, for her employer had given orders that whenever I called up he was to be summoned. I didn't entirely enjoy myself for one side of me kept saying, "Miss Mercy's eyes glistened, and isn't this the same?" However, I managed to deaden the sound. I can do that of late.

Mr. Rafferty was raging over the phone when a clerk showed me in. "Don't get gay with me, young man," he was saying, "and stow yer gab till I'm through. You'll do this my way or —" he looked up as I stood in the doorway, smiled, growled at the phone again, then with a shout to make up for his weakening, told the offender to do as he pleased — he had no time to bother — and hung up the receiver.

"Look out of the window there," he said, push-

ing me along. "Get a little of God's sunlight into you this day. You can stand it. Saints above, what a skin!"

I looked down upon Boston blanketed in snow, so pure and impure, which I shall always love for the joy and the misery it has given me. "Which way is Cambridge?" I asked.

He waved his hand toward the right, and then eyed me suspiciously as I looked across the strip of river toward Van's rooms. "Say, you aren't stuck on one of them Harvard babies, are you?" he demanded.

I shook my head. "I like older men."

He put a big hand on my shoulder. "Do you like me, dearie?" I was about to deny it but he stopped me. "Don't answer," he shouted, "I'll not be insulted in my own office."

We both enjoyed that. He and I laughed at the same time, whereas Van and I laughed at different moments — when we laughed at all. Looking back upon our hours together, they were very unmirthful. "Were!" How curious to put all this in the past. I wanted to talk about Cambridge so as to feel nearer to the other one, but Mr. Rafferty switched me off.

He placed a chair in the sun for me. "Sit there, and let it pour down on you; you're a skinny little bantam." This was his idea of a compliment and I didn't mind.

He asked me about my work at school. He

was always deeply interested, and very indignant when he thought I was slighted, wishing to send out his men and "break" someone immediately.

It is strange how I continued the routine of my school life. Are we all doing the same thing. Do we all go on keeping calm outside with such a tumult of unrest inside? I am just as ordinary as are the other girls outside — just as absorbed in my studies. Nothing is ever slighted in my work, my body becomes more supple, and the steps that I devise with the ballet teacher are more and more intricate. But there is no longer any reason back of it all. And when I am tired physically I am immediately depressed. "To what good?" comes into my mind.

I tried to explain this to Mr. Rafferty. "I get awfully blue. I fear, sometimes, I am going to be a failure."

"No, you ain't," he protested; "not if there's any power in you. Perhaps you're not directed right. I was looked upon as the village good-for-nothing when I was a kid, but I was just storin' up my strength, lookin' fer a chance. It came — in the hold of a ship. When I hit America I began to work."

"I don't seem to hit anything at all."

"Yu don't? I suppose I'm nothin' but thin air."

No matter what we were talking about, Mr.

Rafferty always got back to what he was after. I suppose that is power, well directed.

I sighed. I had been over this before — but it no longer made me ashamed. “You’re married,” I began.

“What’s that got to do with lovin’?”

“A man can only love one of them.”

“Wrong; he can love two of ’em.”

“But one of them will have to suffer.”

He hesitated, then slowly, as though playing at cards and uncertain of his game. “If that’s what’s worrying yu, I’ll never let my wife suffer, rest assured.”

A wave of indignation swept over me, and then another of horror at this indignation. In a few weeks I had so readjusted my viewpoint that my instinctive sympathies were for the woman who wasn’t married. I was, for the moment, angry that, in the event of my caring for Mr. Rafferty, he would in every first instance protect his wife.

“Oh, it’s too horrible, too horrible!” I cried out, covering my face with my hands. He came over and pulled them awkwardly away.

“You’re white,” he exclaimed; “have a little nip, eh?”

“No, no, I don’t want anything. It isn’t that.”

“What’s horrible to you?”

“Everything. My being here at all, and my

permitting you to talk for a moment of the possibility of our caring for each other."

He caught the cloth of my coat sleeve between his fingers and worried it a little. "Say, couldn't you care?" he pursued. The recognition of the crumbling of my moral fiber didn't disturb him in the least.

"You've asked me that a hundred times until I've tried to avoid you, and I would never see you — only I get lonesome. The thing that is dreadful is this: a year ago I ran away when a man I loved talked as boldly as you do. Now I argue this out with you. It's just like creeping paralysis."

He disregarded the creeping paralysis. His face was ugly. "Do you love that fellow yet?" he growled.

"Yes," I replied.

"All stuff," he retorted. He wouldn't entertain it for a moment. What he did not wish to believe did not exist. "It's just fellows like that — puppy loves — that I'm trying to save you from. I'm the man for you."

"But I'm a young girl," I answered. I felt the tears back of my voice. It seemed so loathsome that I should be screaming aloud the little goodness that remained in me. "I'm not yet eighteen. Wouldn't it be a sin against your soul if you made me love you?"

He would hear nothing that impeded him. "Don't tangle me up with such vexatious questions. You're a little slip of a thing, and you're the kind ut needs protectin'." I gulped, and he noticed it. "I wish I could protect yu the right way, for I'm just heartsick with caring fer yu, but you know I can't. There'll be wolves and jackals on your trail always. Put me down as nothin' more dangerous or more plottin' than a grizzly bear, and about as clumsy. I tell you, tiny, yu need me."

I walked out of the bright light into a darker corner of the room. "I need someone, something, to set me straight with the world, but a married man can't do it."

He followed me and pawed at my shoulder. "You're speakin' through tears, dearie, and yer eyes are full of mist. That's the first encouragement Rafferty's ever received from yu." His voice was husky.

I shrugged off his hand. He was only dangerous in that he was now offering, in this queer left-handed fashion, what I felt the need of.

"I don't like to see yu goin' round the world all alone, darlin'," he continued, "and shakin' yer pretty feet fer a little money. This struggle fer bread will be too hard fer yu. Some kind of girls can do it, but not your kind. I want yu to do yer work, if it's yer work, but not with starvation starin' yu in the face till all the baby curves

take fright from its ugly mug, and run away forever."

"I turned away from him and the tears fell down on my shabby muff. "I shan't boast any more of my being still pretty good, because that doesn't seem to have any weight with you, but —"

"Saints alive!" he interrupted. "It's because yu are good that I want to keep yu so. You're not fer the crowd."

"No," I breathed. For the first instant in my life I was really tempted, and by a married man whom I didn't love.

He saw my wavering and followed it up. "I don't say that what I'm offerin' yu is the thing to offer a young girl, but takin' it all in all, knowin' yu as I do, it's the best solution fer yu. You ain't strong, and I can give yu comforts —"

"Oh, stop it, stop it," I moaned. "Don't try to tempt me with luxuries. It's a waste and it's useless. I don't love you, you're married, and it's eternally wrong."

I was now in the farthest corner of the bare office. The sun was pouring in, the surroundings were not soft or enveloping, yet the strife was the same that I had encountered before. I was the same, and Mr. Rafferty was just another man. His voice had deepened as he continued his pleading. After a certain emotional crisis I think that men must all be alike.

"You're married," I repeated again when he

had paused for an instant in his further arguments.

"I wouldn't hurt any woman," he said and then he was quiet for so long that I turned from my corner to look at him. His jaw was working vindictively. "You force it out of me," he finally said. The perspiration was on his forehead. "I never thought to tell any man or woman, but — yu can't hurt her. She don't like me. She don't want me to come around her. She's high toned."

There were many things that I could have said, but I didn't know which to say first. Polite phrases rose to my lips: "I'm sorry," or "Everyone has his trouble," but I knew he didn't want to be pitied. The formula that New Washington would have used passed through my mind. I could have reasserted that, even so, she was his wife. The thought was homely and true, but his head was bent and the speech seemed too thin for the moment.

It did not occur to me that I was deeply concerned in the situation until he moved toward me, peering out from under his red shaggy eyebrows, while his humiliation gave place to the joy of the struggle.

"Now, girl," he said, "you've heard my bitter shame, and yu know there's nothin' in this wide world to keep us apart. Nothin' real, nothin' that counts. Laws were made fer the lawless; we ain't that."

He went on. I was entirely hedged about. My brain grew very simple. It seemed to be grasping nothing but what would occur to sheep as they were being driven into the fold. "Into the fold!" That thought had come to me somewhere before. Mr. Rafferty's voice was ceaseless now. His words guided me to the right or the left like the pressure of a dog's flanks against the flock. Only the gist of his arguments made any impression on me.

"Young girl — country prejudices — sound ones, too — when overcome — those girls go quickest — yu ought to have a mother — but yu haven't — you're too pretty — too soft — I'm not out soul savin' — but I'm offerin' you a harbor — you could do worse — I know the world — only the shrewd can fight it — with my arms round you — anything you've suffered — you'll forget — I'm not deceivin' you — it ain't the best I'm offerin' you — the best I have to offer — all your life I'm yours — all my life, rather — enough, income afterwards, to keep you from, from goin' on — you'll be happy — happy just to have it settled — no more battles — peace."

My brain grew thicker — more tranquil. The gates of the curious fold were opened wide for the sheep to pass within. It was very still. I was very still. A man put his face down to mine, put his lips close to mine. He was just a man, a stranger. By chance his name was Rafferty. I

pushed away from him, my arms were strong;
I spoke to him, my mind was clear.

"I should die if you kissed me."

I moved toward the door. He endeavored to intercept me, but he was clumsy and I was alive. As I stepped into the outer office a clerk stood as though about to knock, with telegrams in his hand. There was no opportunity for further words. I think I said good-by, but Mr. Rafferty was not the man for social exigencies. The Boss roared in his retainer as I passed out.

XII

Is it my fault that Van doesn't want to marry me?

Is there any difference between loving a man a great deal and loving him entirely?

Is there wisdom in any other way of living?

Aren't these the arguments that Van once advanced?

Well, have I ever argued correctly?

Haven't I made a mess of everything I've tried to manage myself?

Haven't I dragged myself in the mire in my effort to forget him?

Is there any reason to believe that I won't go on doing this?

Is it not character-destroying to listen to one man that I may forget another?

Is it not better to be associated with a man who has no wife than a man who has one?

If I don't at present care for a married man, might it not happen some day?

Can we not accustom ourselves to anything?

Is the prospect of going this weary round attractive?

Is there any chance of my living any other way
when every one tells me I'm a weakling?

Do you call it just bad luck?

Can there be any good luck for my type which
seems to court misfortune?

Didn't I give the other side a chance?

Why doesn't it push forward more?

Doesn't my bad side always push?

Isn't my good side my weaker side then?

And am I not, in consequence, more bad than
good?

Am I to blame for the way I was born?

Aren't there always people aiding my bad side?

Then why doesn't someone aid the good in me?

Why does the good side stand for all the ugly
things?

How can I want to be good when it means I must
give up Van?

Did I ask to love him?

Am I to blame then?

Is it not sufficient humiliation to know that he is
not splendid, yet I still love him?

Don't I deplore the wickedness of what I may
be driven to, but am I not just bewildered and
crushed and frightened?

Don't I know that seeing Van can alone save me
from this cheap parading of myself?

Is it my fault that Van doesn't want to marry
me?

I am going in a circle.

XIII

I'LL try for another week. I'll keep sending back Mr. Rafferty's flowers and his theater tickets; I shan't answer his notes. I'll not look for Van as I pass along the streets. I shan't go to hear music, which tears me to pieces. No, I shall do none of these things. Instead, I shall sit downstairs in the rocker and refine myself still further by listening to Mrs. Short talk of her lodgers. I shall hear of Mrs. Belstone who has already gone on to Luke; of the seamstress, Miss Cherry, and her friend who calls on her pay days; of Mrs. Edson who cries a great deal because her husband comes "home" so seldom; of Pearl who makes a lot of money and whose mother pities me because I am not a successful entertainer also.

I shan't go to luncheon with Theodora, who hugs me close when she comes in on Saturdays and admits, now, that her device may have been wrong. "I didn't think it possible that I could learn anything more here," she said, all her vain-gloriousness gone.

I wouldn't let her know for the world, but just as Jennie was always foreign to me, I find that

Theodora is growing a little so. It's wrong, I know. With all Miss Mercy's gentleness, I am not as fine as I was when I prefer her to sturdy Theodora. I think it's because she's on the wrong side of life too. She couldn't take care of herself either, but Theodora can always take care of herself.

I know all about Miss Mercy's going West, and why she came back. Pearl's mother, Mrs. Reed, retailed the gossip she had heard, but wouldn't believe it. However, when Miss Mercy told me, it seemed quite all right. I came into her room one night when she was labeling little boxes of trinkets and sealing them up in a larger box. "They are for my nephews and nieces when I am gone," she explained.

That embarrassment and exasperation with which we attempt to fight tears possessed me. For a moment I resented her making me so miserable, but when I finally let myself cry I could talk about her going quite simply. I asked her why she didn't return West where she had been so happy. It was not difficult to say that, for when one has spoken of death one can speak of anything — the events of life don't matter.

Then she told me that he had grown very poor. She did without everything for years so that she could just stay on and see him now and then, but, of late, there hadn't been enough money for her and his wife, too, so she came East that

she might not deny his family what rightfully belonged to them.

I am glad Miss Mercy is different from the other women in this house. It proves that I need not be like them either. I mean I could be different if I were not as I am now. But I mustn't talk about this. I mustn't write down the thoughts that are in my head, for when thoughts are written down they begin to live.

The door bell has clanged, and my heart turns over at the sound like a sick woman in her bed.

XIV.

THE door bell was Everett. He rang it, I mean. Sarah never thought of asking him to wait in Mrs. Short's room; she said, "One flight front," and disappeared down the basement steps. I knew it was not Van's voice and I didn't care whether or not it was Mr. Rafferty's, so I had gone on pasting the handkerchiefs, which I had just washed, against the mirror of the folding bed.

After a little, I heard an uneasy moving about outside, and then a mild knock on the door of the hall bedroom, which is empty at present. I opened my own door and found Everett in the dark, looking confused. He wore the cape overcoat that he had bought last winter. It is still very fashionable in New Washington but it does not seem so much so here. Since I have known Mr. Rafferty, though, I realize that one can be a power, and greatly esteemed, yet wear any kind of clothes.

I don't believe I was glad to see Everett, but I was immediately touched in that he still cared to see me. I wished he was someone that I could cry before without frightening, but instead

of crying I was very polite. We never show our feelings right away at home.

"This is a great surprise," I began; "come in."

"I don't care if I do," said he, sitting down on the nearest chair. I was glad it wasn't the big woolly one. After a minute he agreed to take off his overcoat, and I put it on the lounge. I wanted to cover up all the places that he shouldn't sit.

"I've come on business," he explained. "We are extending our line, and I'm here to do the buying."

I said I thought extension was a good thing. Then I asked about every one, taking them by the streets. Everett answered, although it didn't make any difference to him, or any to me.

"Mrs. Andrews tells me Lucy Beck is going to be married," was one of my statements.

"Yes. I guess Mrs. Andrews gives you all the news."

I admitted this, but we still continued to talk of the members of the Bon Ton Dancing Club. It was not only to gain time. I knew he would be forced, by nature, to go through certain conventional remarks before he could get down to any subject that was near his heart. Yet the pauses grew oppressive and, at last, I put the first question:

"Why did you come to see me, Everett? I

said I wasn't going to write to you any more, and that it would be better if you just forgot all about me."

He took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow and the edge of his collar. "I've come because I've seen Mrs. Andrews. She takes it for granted that you write to me, and she asked me if I didn't think you were lucky to get into the same boarding place that you had last year."

"Yes?"

"I remembered what you hinted about the place you were in last year. I understood you had moved over to Tremont Street."

"I was ill and I came back here because they were so good to me. You thought this locality was all right then."

"Yes, I believed it was. It's a nice broad street. But when the drummers came up this winter I began asking them about it."

"You were curious! That's very Yankee."

He accepted the compliment. "Yes, I'm a Yankee all right. It was my duty."

"What did they say?"

"They laughed and filled me up with yarns. I was sorry, but, as you say, you were with Jennie last year, and I didn't know until three days ago that you were living here still."

A lump came up in my throat. Here was someone who was anxious about me. "Oh, Everett, to think of your caring." My voice

broke for the moment. "I can't talk about it, Everett."

He didn't want me to. He looked about in an effort to hide any responsive emotion, and his eyes rested on the handkerchiefs stretched to dry upon the mirror. "What's that?" he asked.

"They're handkerchiefs."

"I know, but what are they on? What's the furniture?"

"They're on my folding bed."

"Then this is your bedroom?" He colored as he spoke.

I nodded.

The next question was so unusual that I couldn't believe he had asked it and he repeated it, "And so Mr. Ruyne comes here?"

"There are few parlors in the student quarter. This is customary," I answered quietly, but my brain was little steel wires, being careful not to get mixed.

"Oh, he does come then? So it's true."

"What do you mean?" I said. "What does he know?" the wires vibrated.

He took from his inner pocket a greenish gray envelope. My heart went out toward the color for it was Van's paper. "He wrote me about his forests, and here's what he said at the end."

I extended my hand. "Let me read it myself," I begged.

He was suspicious. "Do you think I'm going to make anything up?"

"No, no," I disdained. "It doesn't matter." It didn't. I had only wanted to see his handwriting once more.

He read aloud: "Do this for me, my dear fellow, and I shall be still further at your service for any city commissions. I am already deeply your debtor for introducing me to little Miss Robinson, whom I see occasionally, and admire unceasingly."

It was strange to hear Everett laboring seriously with Van's flowery expressions. He put away the letter carefully as he watched me with reproach. "So you saw him all along, and last summer you pretended you hadn't."

"I told you he had gone to Europe and that I didn't expect to see him again. I didn't." I was no longer afraid.

"Are you his girl?"

I started to protest, indignant with the brutality of his question, but I remembered that his parlance and mine were no longer the same. "Is he your beau?" was what he meant. He would have been overwhelmed had I accused him of an impure thought. I was answering his queries without anger. "You are before a good man," kept recurring to my mind.

"Are you his girl," again from him.

"I don't think I am, Everett."

Over his blue eyes spread a film of bewilderment. There is no thinking about it in our town. You are or you aren't. He looked around the room again, shaking his head. His eyes rested on the hair brushes and toilet articles. Then he rose to a height of abnegation that is only humorous in the telling; it was not funny to him or to me. "If you want him, Missy, get a parlor — I won't cut in — I want you to be happy. But the way to catch him is by being perfectly correct."

The instinct to angle, to trade, to connive was still with him. It was an honorable method in all the pursuits of life. But it was no more a trait of New England than was the generosity of his nature.

"I'm not fishing for him, Everett," was my answer. "He isn't for me. Don't bother."

He dropped his arms to the side of his chair, and I knew he was going to scoot it toward me. I shut my eyes so as not to see him do it. When he had reached me he endeavored to place one of his hands over mine; but as I withdrew mine, his fell upon my knee, and he hastily thrust the offending member into his pocket. Yet he spoke:

"I say again I want to marry you."

My breath came and went in a fine point between my lips. Only a little while before I had been wondering why some men had not cared

enough to ask for me that way. But I had never thought of him. His glass-of-water face still leaves my memory as he passes out of sight.

"I want to marry you," he again declared.

I bent my head, my chin far down to hide its quivering. To think that I must hurt the one who has never yet hurt me! I wanted to put my arms around him — and not marry him.

"It isn't only that I like you," he pursued, "but I've got to get you out of this."

"This what, Everett?"

"This place where I sent you, this man that I sent to you. Why, I don't believe Van Wyck Ruyne's any good. He should have told you not to live here. I see now he's been working me, and he may be working you. He's —"

Unconsciously I brought my fists down upon his knees. "Don't say another word against him," I shouted.

There was a horrible pause. My hands were over my face. Finally I heard Everett. "Why, good Lord," he said thickly, "you're in love with him."

The sobs came rushing over me and I was caught in the storm. Had he been Van he would have let me weep it out, but he tried to pull my hands away, he prodded my knees with his. "Don't cry, don't cry," was his incessant urging. To hide my contorted features I went to the window and pressed my face into the curtains. After

a while Everett arose and stood timidly behind me.

I wished with all my soul that he had been some great force like Mr. Rafferty to take me in his arms, pull me into a cab and bring me home with him. Yes, since he could never love me with the art of Van, I wished that he could grip me with the character of the Boss. But that he might find a better girl some day, perhaps, he had not the strength I longed for. He only stood behind me, miserably uncomfortable, from time to time offering himself — apologetically — as the best way out for me.

I don't believe Mrs. Short's front room had ever before harbored so sound and sweet a soul. And I should never have known it had I not gone to Boston. "Don't you see that, Everett?" as I tried to tell him how much the hour had meant to me. "To-day I've seen you in your real light. Isn't that worth doing without parlors? Do you suppose I begrudge any mental suffering that makes me see straight? All things are coming to me that way; for every pang of the heart a bit of life is made clearer."

"I sent you here," he muttered, "that's what kills me."

I told him no. "I've never blamed you for it. You gave me my first enthusiasm. It doesn't matter what a girl grows enthusiastic over — it's enough to have it just the first. I can't blame my

father, either, whom I have always felt that I was like. Back of it all is a power that seems at first glance a desire, but it is the machinery of life that sends me going on and on."

"I can't have you 'going on' in this neighborhood."

I looked at him gravely. "And I can't leave this neighborhood to 'go on' with you. I wish I could, but that would only be retreat. No, I've got to fight it out alone."

"But what's to become of you, Missy?" he cried in despair.

"Why, I don't know," I answered incuriously. "And I'm not sure that it makes any difference what becomes of me. Even those who lose the battle are not cowards — if they have fought."

When I helped him into his overcoat to catch the train for home, I was still doing the comforting. He had uttered some threat about going to see Van, but I think he was relieved when I asked him not to. He was not afraid, but there was little to quarrel about. For you can't fight a man because he doesn't love the girl you love. I went down to the door, and as I closed it upon him, I felt that I was shutting out the little brother of Mrs. Edson.

XV

EVERETT went right out of my scheme of living again as he has always done and Theodora has taken charge once more. She has another plan for me. If I get out and do something I can crowd out the sorrow in my life, and, after a while, I shall be so hard worked that I'll forget all about it. "Work," said Theodora, looking bouncing and vigorous, "eternal work is the thing — until you ask for nothing in life but a bed to tumble in."

"How shall I get it?" I asked.

"Go ask the president, and go register with all the entertainment bureaus. But the main thing is to keep wishing it. I honestly believe this: if you're in real distress, if you really want something to take the place of this ridiculous infatuation for this unworthy man, it will come. I've been reading some books and I'm just full of maxims, so I know what I'm talking about."

"Haven't I already tried?"

"You've tried one form of emotional excitement for another and it was wrong. Now let us try this. I shan't go to luncheon to-day. I'll go around with you to the bureaus."

So I put on my best clothes and we went to the

offices. When I reached the desk I hadn't much to say for myself. I had no diploma and no experience, and all they could vaguely promise me was a trial performance where I wouldn't receive any money. The only definite thing was the fee. Still, I was glad to pay that, for it seemed respectable, and it gave me an opportunity of going in and asking "anything to-day," as I heard a number of girls doing. I would never know until I got there whether or not there *was* "anything to-day," and that would keep me interested.

The president still demurred over presenting me so soon. "There is plenty of time in the spring," he said, "when I can arrange a charming *début* for you — your Greek dances, you know, before the right kind of people."

"But, oh, please," sitting on the edge of the chair, "couldn't it be right away, or just the promise of it right away — something to work on — something to hold on to?"

"Work on your dance steps, my child, and keep your voice flexible. In the meantime store up your strength. You young girls are really better off living very quietly, engrossed in your studies."

"Professor," the pink was coming up from my heart like a flag of shame, "weren't you in school in Boston? Don't you remember how you had to keep very busy to keep out of mischief?"

He laughed reminiscently. "Oh, our salad days! Girls are denied that green age — fortu-

nately for them. I remember well. Living with my parents in Charles Street was about the hardest lot of a student, I thought at that time."

"Oh, you lived with your father and mother," I murmured, rising. Even the knowledge of the poor student along Columbus Avenue was not his.

"Yes. I don't regret it now. But at the time, I thought it narrowing — narrowing."

When I left him I felt like his grandmother.

But I have done as Theodora told me. All week I have kept waiting for the opportunity, watching for it, willing it to come. And it has come, even sooner than I had hoped. Although I was "willing" it, and kept saying "you must obey me, you must help me out," I was surprised when it presented itself. I don't think I had actually expected it. I wondered immediately if I could have made Van come to see me had I tried this "willing," as outlined by Theodora. It seems a great waste of power to have willed myself to be an entertainer when I might have brought Van to see me by the same effort.

Still, I was very glad when Sarah ushered a colored girl into my room just an hour ago. The colored girl said she had come for the young lady who entertained. Mrs. Short and Miss Mercy were having dinner out with Jimmy's sister's plumber, and that is the reason Sarah was being mistress of ceremonies.

"It's an opportunity fer yez, Miss Melissa," she

said. "They do be wantin' a young lady to do some entertainin' this evenin', and this gyrul don't rightly know the name of the young lady, but I told her you would do."

Sarah was gesticulating wildly behind the maid's back as she was speaking. It was as evident to her as to me that the girl had been sent for Pearl, but both Mrs. Reed and her daughter had gone to Lowell for the night, and of course, if the entertaining must be done that evening it would be robbing no one if I took her place.

The servant kept staring at me stupidly with no information whatever save that I need not take dinner at home, and to be sure to be there by eight. She gave me the address. It was in a nice street, not far away. I could walk there even in my cream wool crêpe.

When she went away I began dressing immediately although it was but six then. It's only seven now, and I am writing because I have half an hour to kill before I start. I am so happy. I'm going to do something worth while. I'm going to start my real fight for existence. As soon as I begin on my work I shall be doing the world's work. I can buy my own necessities, yes, even comforts from now on, probably. I shall never have to depend upon a man who emphasizes the weakness of my physical being that he may profit by the weakness of my moral being.

I feel that I have done the moral side of me an

injustice. The bad side of me can't be the stronger side, or I should have continued attracting evil, not good. By my just wanting it, and needing it very much, a way is found for me to keep busy — and forget. I pause for one moment, for I am not sure that I want to forget — entirely — though I wish I wanted to. And to be honest, if I could just choose between seeing Van to-night and "entertaining," I am afraid I would still want him. But I am not going to think of this, for caring for Van is a habit that is clinging to me long after I ought to be rid of it.

However, it is a great encouragement to know the right people want you on their side, and make you feel that you belong there.

I must go now. The glass globe is going round, and the ruby ray which I call Van tries to stain my bosom with its flood of color, but I have illuminated the room, and the fires fight each other. I have been too long in the dark. I must try to "bloom up into the light."

XVI

I HAVE sent for Van. I posted the letter after I returned from — from the house of entertainment. This morning I went to school just the same — the outside of me smiling with the rest of the girls. But there was a great driving noise within, a great hammering. I finally decided it was my soul making a coffin for the good that is left in me.

There is no use for that any more, there never has been any use. Goodness attracts goodness, so I must be very bad, indeed, or I should not have attracted the house of entertainment. And all the time I thought that I was "willing" some wonderful way of being happy and good both.

I started at half past seven exactly last night, but after I had my ulster on, I realized that I would be there at least fifteen minutes too soon, and would, perhaps, be despised by the hostess. I made myself sit down for five minutes, and that made it twenty minutes to eight when I passed the Dartmouth street clock. This frightened me, for I didn't want to be late, and I even thought of taking a cab, but that would have brought me there ahead of time again, so I walked rapidly. I was

almost there when I found a clock in a basement shop made it only a quarter to the hour, after all. So then I crept, walking past the house to the corner and back, before ascending the stoop and ringing the bell.

It was a nice place with those shining plate glass windows which give one something to live up to. A maid was just pulling down the shades as I rang, and I could see the Boston fern which ornamented the bow-window, and, farther back, the glow of a coal fire. There was only a light in the hall.

I didn't get any farther than the hall. The girl let me in and left me standing there for some time. I kept saying over to myself the things I could recite and a few songs I might sing, and I had brought music in case someone could play for me to dance. The hostess came down the stairs. She was gray-haired and very simply gowned. My *crêpe* was quite dressy in comparison.

She kept looking down over her gold-rimmed spectacles as she descended, in an attempt to see, but when she reached me her glasses came to her aid. "Why, you're not the girl!" she exclaimed. Her voice was pleasant but practical, like Mrs. Short's.

"No, I'm not," I said, trying to make my lips smile, "but I hope I shall answer. Miss Reed is out of town for the night."

The woman looked at me in the utmost con-

sternation. I thought she was appalled because her party would be spoiled by not having Pearl.

"The colored maid was shown to my room," I added hastily, "and I thought I might do. I can sing and recite and dance a little."

"But, my dear child, you won't do at all," she cried, as though the judgment day had arrived.

I was terribly disappointed. I thought I ought to "will it" harder perhaps. "Won't you try me? I'm not so terrible," I asked, endeavoring to make my pleading a sort of a joke. "I've been studying in school here, and I should like to make a little money."

She looked at me curiously for a second, a sort of whimsical smile twisted her lips. "It's too ridiculous," she said.

The color rushed into my face. There wasn't anything more to say after being called ridiculous. I bowed and started to go. She took my hand in hers and pressed it. "I didn't mean to hurt you," she continued. "You're a dear child, and I would give a thousand dollars to have you stay. Yes, I could easily give that, but it's impossible. You see, it's this Pearl I'm after." When she spoke of Pearl she looked contemptuous.

I was too bewildered to argue further. "I'm sorry," was all I could mutter.

"Well, I'm sorrier than you are. Sorry that you came up here, I mean. I shall kill that darky." My hand was on the door knob.

"Wait," she commanded. She extinguished the light in the hall, then opened the door for me. "Now run down quickly. It's too bad — the whole occurrence."

"Good-by," I choked out.

"Good-by," she replied through a crack in the door.

I was glad that I hadn't taken a cab. My little purse felt very flat as I clutched it in my muff. I was rather faint, for we usually have dinner at half past six. I stumbled along the streets where a few minutes before I could scarcely keep my feet on the earth. I didn't understand any of it except that I wasn't wanted. I wasn't even as much wanted in life as Pearl.

When I neared the house I saw a woman running toward me. Her long coat was unfastened and flying in the wind. When she came nearer I saw that it was Miss Mercy's sealskin — that it was Miss Mercy.

"Has anything happened?" I called to her.

She couldn't speak for a moment. Her poor breath was all gone. She clung to me, yet I seemed to be clinging to her. The red stood out on her cheeks.

"How long — how long there?" she finally panted out.

"Not two minutes," I replied.

"Thank God, oh, thank God!"

We walked on to the house with our arms

linked. She was breathing so heavily I dared not ask her the cause of her anxiety. The front door was open and Mrs. Short stood in the hall, peering out, with her wraps all awry. "You're there, my dear, you're there?" she greeted me.

"Of course I am," I replied with an effort at cheeriness. "She wouldn't have me. Did Sarah tell you?"

"Oh, miss," came a sobbing wail from the top of the basement steps. Sarah was there with her apron to her eyes.

"Shut that noise, and go get Miss Robinson some supper," snapped Mrs. Short. "You've made trouble enough."

There was no longer any attempt at humor in the situation. I backed against the closed front door.

"I want to know what all this means," I cried wildly.

"Not in the hall, young ladies," said Mrs. Short staidly. She went into the parlor and closed us out.

"I want to know what all this means," I repeated convulsively.

"But you must have some supper," soothed Miss Mercy.

"I want to know what all this means." There seemed to be nothing else in the world to be said.

Miss Mercy led the way upstairs and into my room. The gas was out. I sank into the big

chair. The colors of the globe were drenching me with all the hues of life as they swept around.

"You've got to tell me," I said to her. She stood by my side.

"It's nothing to be unhappy about. It's really a subject for congratulation."

"What sort of a house is that?"

She paused for a moment. "It's a bad sort," she then admitted. "That woman entertains wealthy men lavishly there, and sends for obliging young girls."

"Is that the way Pearl Reed makes money?"

"Yes."

My mind groped in the thick dark. "I see. So one can't make all that money entertaining?"

"I doubt it."

"Not even if a girl 'wills' to?"

"What?"

I let that go, and groped on. Miss Mercy still stood smoothing my hair. My hands were clenched in my lap. "Does her mother know?"

"No; she's blind. We found it out several weeks ago — Mrs. Short and I."

"I suppose poor old Sarah wanted to help me."

"She hadn't an inkling of the truth. When we came home and found where you had gone, I started to run after you."

"Why run?"

"I was afraid you might be trapped into staying."

Trapped! I pored over the word. Driven and driven and driven into a corner, and then the slapping of steel. Was that to be the end of me?

"But you see you weren't trapped," Miss Mercy reminded me.

"No," I said brightening. "No," I thought to myself, "and a procuress saved me."

"And I had started for you."

"Yes," I responded. "Yes," my thoughts continued, "a woman without chastity befriended me."

"While Mrs. Short was left to maintain appearances in case of inquiry."

"That was good of her," I granted. "Good of her," my brain echoed. "My third supporter who profits by vice."

"So it's all ended splendidly," encouraged Miss Mercy.

"It's all ended anyway," I concluded. My hands grew lax.

Then I kissed and thanked her. I could do any of those outside things easily because I had made up my mind. I even called to Sarah "not to care" when she tearfully deposited some dinner outside my door. I didn't want any one to come in. I walked about the room and straightened the pictures as I walked, and laughed sometimes, though my mouth twisted and writhed.

So this was the result of my efforts to attract

goodness. This was my way out — my solution — my clever avoidance of greater danger. This was the best that could be done for me: a house where men met girls, young girls like myself if the party was to be pleasing.

And who stood by me and protected me? Women whom the world, the Back Bay world, shrink from. They are my friends, my instinctive friends. The only ones who put their arms around me. They are my kind, and I am going to be one of them.

Yet, I shall not be like them altogether. I shall not be the overseer of the less prudent ones as is this woman of to-night; I shall not play the sneaking, thrifty game of Pearl's; I shall not steal the husband of another woman; I shall not dull my mind and sharpen my passion by the weary mental idleness of the lodgers in this place; I shall not grow into the comfortable acceptance of these women's lives and find them my only interest as does Mrs. Short.

There's only one way of escape from this and that is to turn to Van. I love him and I can cling to him, and I will be invulnerable to all but him. I shall be set apart. He will sometimes make me miserable — that is the first way he made me happy — but it is not what I shall be to him that will count but what he will be to me. I just don't know any better way.

I wrote the note and stepped over my dinner on

the hall floor to go down and mail it. And, as I said, to-day I went to school and smiled while the coffin for my good side was being put together with a great roaring noise.

When I came home this afternoon the room was full of pale pink roses, and a note from Van said that he would send for me at six, so that we might dine in his rooms — as that would be better: “and I shall kneel at your feet with my head buried in the hem of your little frock until such time as you find courage to bid me become a man.”

XVII

I HEARD the wheels of the cab squeak in the bitter cold as the driver turned around. He had driven past at first, as they all do, for the house is small and wedged in. Then the noise of scrunching the snow ceased, and, after thirty-one counts, the door bell clanged. I noticed that it made no difference with my heart. I lay with my face down on the couch. Miss Mercy's door opened and shut, and Miss Mercy spoke to Sarah as she was lumbering up the basement steps.

"Thank ye," said Sarah, descending.

When the front door was opened I could feel the cold wind shaking my own door, but I wasn't cold or warm or anything. I was just lying there. My arms were hanging down limply on either side. One arm seemed to be longer than the other, for it could touch the carpet. I thought about that — but perhaps I was more on one side than the other.

The cabby didn't want to leave even after Miss Mercy told him I wasn't going, and had given him my note to Van. I don't know what they said. She finally persuaded him. "Hold up," he said to the horse, and then "get up." The

scrunching and screeching commenced, but after forty-five counts the sounds had died away.

"I saw him," called Miss Mercy through the door, and went on down to dinner.

Nothing happened for a long time. I realized that I was crushing my cream wool crêpe, but it didn't make any difference. By and by I found the sofa cushion quite wet. I hadn't been crying. It had come from my wide-open mouth.

I got up and undressed, then I let down the folding bed and crawled in between the cold sheets. My body was like liquid — it seemed to run all over — I couldn't keep myself together. It didn't make any difference.

Miss Mercy came up with some broth, but I was so tired from undressing that I couldn't lift my head to take any. She fed me a little with a spoon. She was deeply concerned. "It's the shock of last night's experience reacting upon you," she said. "I'm so glad you let me send the driver away. This is no night for parties."

I wanted to encourage her in the belief that it was last night that prevented me from going away in the cab to-night, but I couldn't say anything. Miss Mercy will never know that it was she who kept me from going away in the cab. I wondered if I would thank her when I was an old woman. I wondered if Miss Mercy's saving me would be her own salvation when the time came for her to feel along the dark passage to the light.

My hands wouldn't lift up to clasp hers, but I turned my cheek and pressed it against her hand on the pillow. My eyes spoke to her. "Don't suffer so," she pleaded, thinking of last night's humiliation. "It wasn't your fault."

After I moved my mouth quite a little, I could speak. "Yes, it was."

"You mean you brought it on yourself?"

That was just what I meant, only it was not the desire to make money that had brought it on. Even had I possessed the strength, I couldn't make Miss Mercy understand that it was my tendencies that had sent me there. She had been too long a creature of these tendencies to recognize them as foreign to right living.

"It's all over anyway," she encouraged, rising to go.

She had said something like that last night and I had agreed with her, but I had decided to see Van then, and surely seeing Van would be the end — I thought last night. But now she said again that the end had come, and I felt again that it had, because now I was *not* going to see Van. I guess the end never comes.

I lay between the cold sheets until the globe stopped whirling, and went out. I had never known it to do that before so I felt that it was late. The cars went by seldom. Everything seemed to be suspended for a while.

I didn't think much of Van because there wasn't

any use in doing it. There *really* wasn't any use. I knew that for the first time I had actually given him up. I couldn't plan for what was to come. I didn't "will" anything. I lay in the bed and left the rest of my life to some other power than myself. Set phrases kept recurring to me. I addressed the imaginary power. "You must manage now — I'm beaten — I'll do anything I'm told to do — you must tell me — I don't know — I don't know."

After a while Miss Mercy began coughing. Then I knew it was going to be morning. I was very cold. She had left a little glass of her cordial on a chair by my bedside, and, with an effort, I reached for it, and sipped it. It was very strong. I saw her drink a goblet of it in the afternoon when I went to ask her to fasten up my gown. Her skin grew warmer after she had taken it. She laughed at my being all dressed up; she said I must be going out with my young man. She talked very freely. Sometimes, when Jimmy brings home a bottle of red wine for Sunday dinner she jests and laughs with him in quite a different way than she does ordinarily. I seem to see her out West with her diamond earrings on, and wearing the sealskin coat that is longer than the man's wife's.

"There's trouble in the house," she informed me as she began with the little hooks and eyes at my neck.

"Is there?" but I wasn't thinking of the trouble in the house.

"Yes," she chattered on. "Mrs. Belstone's friend met Mrs. Edson in the hall and stopped to talk with her a moment. It seems that he had met her somewhere. Belstone was hanging over the banisters 'unbeknownst,' and she came down to make her first call upon Mrs. Edson."

"It's too bad," I responded, not wanting to be prim, but feeling embarrassed for her. "Mrs. Edson isn't like Mrs. Belstone."

"No-o," with her fingers tugging at the belt, "not exactly the same." She laughed a little craftily. "Magdalena wasn't like Messalina, nor is an evil woman of society like a *nymphe du pave*, but did it ever occur to you that the beginning is just the same? Every woman has a different *reason* for taking the step but the method of sinning remains as common as dirt."

I was facing the door. She hadn't finished at the belt, but I walked out of the room without turning around. If she had taken a sharp nail and driven it into my brain, the acute consciousness of this idea could not have given me greater pain. Thoughts which had no form, mere words, came into my mind. No, they were not thoughts, they were not words. They were just pictures. Horrible pictures. Ugly pictures. All of us alike, all of us alike! An order! An initiated order!

"But this is too hideous," my breath racked

out. "This is too hideous — there's got to be an escape. All my life I can't see these pictures — but the cab's coming at six — it's almost six. When a cab comes I'll have to take it, won't I? How can I not take a cab when it's sent for me? Oh, why do I talk so much about cabs? That isn't the thing — the thing is — the thing is —" I crouched down and made myself very small so that I could think minutely of what I must do. My brain went to a tiny point, and that point — somehow — made it plain to my hands and to my feet that I must cross the room and write a note. And I crossed the room and I wrote the note: "I am never coming. Now I know." Then my feet carried me over to the couch with the sealed and addressed envelope in my hand. There I dropped.

Miss Mercy found me. The cordial had swept through her like a flame, leaving her spent and wan again. I found out, after a while, that she had come in to beg forgiveness for the roughness of her words to me — "a child." I watched her curiously through my returning from the haze of oblivion. While my saviour, she had crucified me. Who employs the emissaries of knowledge? Who sends these strange messengers? A consumptive who drank from exhaustion had, by her coarseness, driven the nails of agonizing truth into my body and spirit.

The dawn came slowly. The appeal of my soul went on. "I'm beaten — you must manage now

— you, whatever you are — you power — I'll do anything I'm told — you must tell me — I don't know — I don't know."

When I heard Jimmy raking the furnace fire I arose and watched the lamplighter hurrying along. The yellowish circle around each post resolved itself into the spread of purplish snow as the light winked out.

My night was over.

XVIII

I HAVEN'T gone about as yet. I feel like a tree that has been hollowed out. I remember how my blood stirred within me, like fresh sweet sap, last spring. It made me understand why the trees kept waving their branches. It was the life in them. The same life that forced me to want to race around. I am not at all in despair. I die quietly. But I can't manage any more — only, I'll do anything, anything.

A thick letter came from Van. I fingered it a little. I could imagine the cruel words that must have filled the pages. Then I sent it back. The simpler way would have been to have torn it up and not answered, but that would not have impressed Van. He is not simple.

Several of the girls have been to see me. These are the only times that my eyes grow misty. I cling to them, and don't want them to go away. Theodora came, too. She was delighted that I was not despairing. My "willing" myself into that house was quite a blow to her. She doesn't know about the rest.

"Something will happen," I assured her, "but I shan't have anything to do with it."

Theodora was so afraid that it would be Mr. Rafferty's turn to a "happen" that she went downtown and warned him to leave me alone. I accused her of it and she didn't deny what she had done. This was brave in Theodora, for it might have cost her her situation, and he did bellow at her terribly, she said.

Also she stopped to see the president of the school. "He is very concerned over your staying away," she related. "He says he wants you down there on Monday for a particular reason."

Little flickers of interest crept through my torpid being. It was like getting well from a sickness and hearing the crisp rustling of the leaves of the first tulips. "For a particular reason" kept recurring to me all day Sunday.

In the afternoon we went to hear Phillips Brooks. The crowd was tremendous, but we were shown to seats immediately. I was much encouraged. Luck seemed to be coming my way.

I couldn't understand what he said but I didn't need to. The swift rush of words lifted me up and bore me unresistingly along. I was on a pinnacle with him, so were we all. The fashionable men and women and the poor students leaned forward in their seats as though the thick bodies longed to go with the souls which had been carried up to the high places. I don't believe many of them understood him.

"It's pure hypnotism," I heard one man say as we walked out into the square. No one talked of anything but the preacher until all were some distance from the church.

XIX

"PERHAPS it's come," I said to myself when the president sent for me. I didn't know what I meant by "it." It had, though.

Two ladies were in the office with the president. They wore quiet tailor suits but it was no trouble to tell where they lived. I had on my old sailor blouse, but I realized that they didn't care.

"Such a mite!" exclaimed one, holding me by the hand.

"Are you quite strong, my dear?" asked the other.

The president and I assured her that I was very strong. The reason for their coming developed: there were to be some dances for charity in February, and they wanted a danseuse, a premiere danseuse. That was me! I was to be paid for it and perhaps it was to lead to my getting classes next year when I had been graduated.

I kept putting my head on one side and then on the other, and smiling. I could hardly think of anything to say, but when they began to talk of the kind of dances, and wanted a sort of

kirmess, I pulled my chair right up to them and exclaimed, without thinking:

"Oh, no, not at all. That would not be original. Let us have a revival of Greek dances."

They both laughed at my positiveness, and the president "tut tutted," but I rushed on because I was full of my subject. I explained how I had been studying the figures on the friezes and urns in the museum, and had turned the posturing into dance steps. "I'd like to show you," I said, rising hastily.

"But you can't do it here," cried the president. He had a feeling for the incongruity of the surroundings, and knew I should not appear at my best.

"No, I couldn't," I admitted.

"Let her come to my house at five," said one of the ladies as they rose to go. "The committee meets at half after four, and it will be an excellent opportunity. We can decide then and there."

"Yes, that would do, Kathie," coincided the other one. "You can use your ballroom."

I didn't faint when she said ballroom. I felt that there couldn't be any room too beautiful for my Greek dances, but all the time I was wondering if my cheese cloth costume was clean enough.

As soon as they left, I arranged for the accompanist to meet me at the address they gave, and then I left to buy those beautiful silk flesh-

ings which I have always wanted and yet felt it was an extravagance. I could never have worn them, gleaming under my soft draperies, at church entertainments. They cost a great deal of money. Right next door to the costumers was a lovely coat which was the same in price and I needed a good coat to meet the committee. But I didn't any more than hesitate. The wrap would have been for me and the fleshings were for my dances. I said "my dances" to myself, feeling glad that something belonged to me which was good and beautiful both.

Nothing frightened me until the man servant opened the door. He wanted me to go away because Mrs. Abbott, the one I had met, was with a committee. I hated him and I was in terror of him, but I was firm. Finally, Mrs. Abbott came from the parlor, and after that he had to carry my bag to the dressing-room off the ball-room. I didn't know whether or not I ought to give him ten cents, or even a quarter, but I didn't have a quarter so I didn't give him anything. A maid was sent to help me dress but I wouldn't let her in until I had put on the fleshings. However, when I discovered that someone would have to fasten them or have them sag, I called her immediately. I didn't feel that scruples had any right to interfere with my Greek dances.

Mrs. Abbott brought me in a cup of tea herself and when she saw that I was ready she sum-

moned the others to the rear of the house where the ballroom was. I could hear them laughing softly as they came along, all speaking simply because they had nothing to ape, being the ones that are aped themselves.

The accompanist struck the first bar of music before it came to me that I was going out before a lot of people and there would be the eyes, which I always feared, boring holes in me. To aid my success I wondered if I had better think of Van, as I had done before. Yet I dismissed that impatiently. I felt that Van was one of the kind who would do the staring. He would be the most devouring of all. I resented the thought of his helping. I was severe with myself; "there has been too much of the personal in your feeling toward your work. These men and women are here to see dancing, not you." That did me good. I entered the hall feeling that I was just the medium of expression. I was a canvas all covered over with lovely colors. The colors made the picture, the canvas had nothing to do with it. It made me very comfortable to feel that I was entirely covered by the paints.

As I finished each dance, they didn't applaud at all, but soberly discussed the novelty of the idea. One of the men always arose and gave me a chair when I came forward to talk with them and one of the women threw her fur wrap around me. "We must keep her in condition,"

she said. It was all such a business with them that I wasn't at all shy in my scant costume. I felt surrounded, hedged about, but happily so. For the first time in a year I did not need to break from out the ring and stumble on to other circles which I must once more quit. My limbs were trembling with joy. I should have liked to have danced on forever just to show my gratitude. But they wouldn't have wanted it. They were not out devouring dancers with their eyes. They wanted their dinner. When I was ready for the street, one of the committee, who had lingered to chat, came out into the hall with Mrs. Abbott.

"I'll have the butler put you on a car," my hostess said.

"I know the way," I answered, not understanding.

"Yes, but it's so late for a young girl to be out alone," she asserted.

I was too astonished to reply. It was only seven.

"I'll put her down, Kathie," the other one offered. "My carriage is here."

There was nothing to be said. Even after I gave her my address she drove me all the way home. I suppose when a woman is sure of herself she can take chances. As we neared the house I saw Van coming down the steps and swinging toward us. I shrunk back as far as I

could for I didn't want him to see me, but he never thought of looking into a private carriage. A girl passed as we were driving directly past him. She spoke to him, and while he didn't want to be bothered stopping, he made a sword-like lunge at her with his walking stick. She squealed and I could see his large teeth as he laughed.

I was very weak in the knees but it was because I was glad I had missed him, not because I hadn't. The appreciation of this made me dizzy. It was like deep breathing after a long stinting of my lungs.

Mrs. Short, who had seen me drive up as she was looking from the parlor window, wasn't at all cross about my being late to dinner. "And Mr. Ruyne's been waiting for an hour," she informed me, as though wonders would never cease.

"Mrs. Short," I said to her, "I'm not going to see Mr. Ruyne any more. Will you say that if he ever calls again?"

She sat down suddenly. "Well, that's right, my dear. Although he's a fascinating fellow he won't fit in with that—" she waved her hand toward the window where she had viewed the brougham.

"He won't fit in with my work; that's the reason," I answered importantly.

It was not until I reached my room and threw myself in the big chair where so many people have loved so many people, that the glory of it

overcame me. Tears were on my cheeks, but they were cool, they didn't burn me. I was alone in the big chair, and I was glad of it. Through my sobs I cried: "I didn't want to see him, I didn't even want to see him."

The big chair, in all its experience at Mrs. Short's house, had never seen anything like that before.

XX

Now comes fear! And I know there is no escaping it. When one wants to work well fear must be the good.

It is in all forms. There are days when I torture myself mildly with dwelling on the prospect of a broken ankle, snapped just before the performance. There are nights, as I toss around in bed, when the prospect of changing from one Greek gown to another in a given time looms up as an impossibility. There are cruel, unnecessary dreams that I may lose my draperies when I dance. I have awakened to the sound of hisses, and I have gone to sleep with the conviction that when the hour comes I shall run.

I am harassed with the knowledge that in duty bound I must succeed. The sense of responsibility is like a shroud about me. Once I tried to discover if it would make any difference if I alone were bad — since the others would be capable.

"That would simply spoil it all," said Mrs. Abbott brightly.

"She's only fishing," added another, thinking to be kind.

"You're not going to fail us?" asked an old gentleman, shaking his finger at me.

"No, no!" I cried. Fail them! Fail myself! This was my opportunity. It had been given me. I must not let it slip.

I stayed in Boston through the holidays that we might rehearse daily. I am always there promptly, but the amateurs are continually being absent altogether — having a sore throat or keeping a luncheon engagement. I am afraid of these fashionable girls and young women. They talk about things of which I know nothing, and the fact that I am rich in a knowledge which has been withheld from them, doesn't make me feel superior. I would have been better off without it. Yet I don't want to unlearn all my sad wisdom. Perhaps I ought to, but I don't. It would be like removing a portion of myself. I should never be whole again. Nor would I be any of these girls. As miserable as I have been, I wouldn't be anything but myself. Why is that?

Sometimes when I come home late from rehearsal, on the days that most of the girls have gone to luncheons, I grow very despondent, and feel that all this excitement which has crowded out everything else in my life, is only of the moment; that a substance more solid than these pirouettings must take the place of the realities in my life if the realities are to go forever. Yet pirouetting can't be entirely froth or why should I be so afraid of it. There is something back of this.

XXI

MISS MERCY is very ill. She has gone to her sisters in the country. I wake up toward morning because the silence of her not coughing is so ringing.

A new fear came to me: what if Miss Mercy died on the day of the Greek dances? I wondered how I could appear, and how I could explain to the committee if I didn't. I excused myself for the first time from rehearsal, and went out to see her. I wanted to go, but I was ashamed of myself, too. I had seen a picture just that morning of a young woman propitiating a god.

It was very cold, but the wind doesn't go up and down streets in the country; it flies everywhere, and one doesn't mind so much. The snow crunched under my feet as the wheels of the cab did when it came for me that night. Sounds always bring back miseries to me. They are the echoes.

The cab coming for me seems a long time ago. Van and I haven't met since, although he tries to see me more than he did before. He sent Mrs. Short a pretty pin for "past kindnesses," and she accepted it with delight, but when he called again,

she still insisted that I wasn't at home. She was wearing the pin, too.

I caught myself feeling sorry for Van the other day. He would kill me if he thought I ever had occasion to be sorry for him. Some of the organization were talking of having "gentlemen ushers" at the performance instead of paid ones. It had been suggested to a man at his club: "Van Wyck Ruyme called my attention to the saving of money this way. He offers to look after the department."

There was a mild little pause — no noise but my heart. Then an elderly woman disposed casually of him: "Mr. Ruyme? Oh, yes, I know his aunt, a worthy woman. Very kind of him, but he isn't quite — quite — is he?"

Indifferently they went on to talk of other matters. I felt surer of myself. Even I, a long time ago, had seen that he wasn't "quite — quite."

The reviewing of these events brought me to the door of the house where Miss Mercy lay sick. I had intended to give the whole pilgrimage to dwelling upon her — instead I had been thinking of Van, of the dances, of my future after the dances. I cried on the doorstep a little before I knocked. I was just as cruel as life. I was life. She was in the reckoning only that she might die at the wrong time.

In a passion of regret I hung about her bed to prove that I loved her. I even spoke of it,

and that is hard for any one from New Washington to do. "You saved me from a terrible unhappiness," I said, "and I want you to know it." She smiled with joy. "You have been my guiding star," I went on. Of course she hadn't — absolutely. It was *not* wanting to be like her, and all the rest of them, that had saved me. Still I'm glad I told her, but it's strange what chances we take with a dying person when we know they'll see perfectly how things stand in just a little space of time.

All the lodgers at Mrs. Short's wanted to know how she was when I returned, and I went from room to room telling them of my visit. Miss Cherry was crotcheting her a little shawl. I am like Mr. Edson, for I am two different people; one in the Back Bay and one over here among the lodgers. They were curious about my other life. They hurried on from Miss Mercy to ask about my dancing and whom I met over there. I think they were more interested in this than they were in our sick friend — really.

"Don't they care where you live?" asked Mrs. Belstone curiously.

"They're too courteous, if they do care, to say anything," I replied. "Besides, I'm only a paid dancer. And they know I'm poor."

"Yes, we're all poor," echoed Mrs. Belstone, justifying herself rapidly. "That's the reason we have to live as we do."

"One of the ladies who drove me home the other day said that when I had classes next year I must be nearer to them all."

"I bet you'll go right up," exclaimed Mrs. Belstone generously.

Her optimism cheered me more than she knew. It's so encouraging in my neighborhood to talk of going up instead of going down.

XXII

I HAVE seen Van again. Yesterday was the day of the dress rehearsal. We began early in the morning and I didn't go to school. Always before, when we went to the hall to dance, we entered by the big front doors, but yesterday we were told to go by the stage entrance. It made a great many of even the dullest girls thrill to go in by the stage door, but I didn't thrill. Only I thought: "This dirty door is very business-like, this is very real. Perhaps there is some substance in pirouetting, after all."

But that was at ten in the morning. We didn't leave until five in the afternoon, and many mothers had sent for the amateurs and were highly indignant. It had been a dreadful day. Everything went wrong. The auditorium was cold and unpeopled save by anxious individuals making poor suggestions, who only served to emphasize the emptiness of the place. All my early terrors seized me. I felt enormously alone and futile. Every empty seat sneered at me, and I thought I heard laughter among the scattered members of the charity organization. Once or twice I faltered and my own ballet mistress, as

well as the one who arranged the ensemble dances, spoke to me sharply.

As each number was concluded I lingered in the wings hoping that someone would say I was good. I knew I wasn't, but if someone would only say so it would pull me along. It was terrible the way they all appeared to avoid me. They went about with their arms full of decorations, making a detour, it seemed, whenever they saw me. One would think the whole event lay in the striped bunting they were putting up. I grew very angry, and decided that I would show them in the next dance. But when the next dance came I wasn't any better.

Almost every one had gone when I was ready to leave. I had a number of costumes and I remained to see that they were properly hung up in my dressing-room. Then I started out alone. My legs ached fearfully. I wanted to take a cab but I didn't feel that I should spend the money, so I leaned against the iron post as I waited for a car.

My future was very black. I had chosen dancing for my profession — a light, airy work — I had called it — and it wasn't airy at all. It was a profession weighed with tremendous responsibility, and in exchange for an hour of flitting about were hours, weeks, months, years of the most exhausting labor. But it was not the prospect of the work that was appalling to me,

but the fear that all my efforts were for nothing. I had simply mistaken my talents.

I could not believe this, however. I stamped my heel in the snow and reviled those cold correct people who had ignored me during the rehearsal. But the fire against them could not remain burning long. I was too fatigued for maledictions. I propped myself up against the iron post once more, and prayed for nothing but a car to take me home. After a little I was conscious that a man stood by me, also waiting. He was not long breaking the silence.

"Why the hell don't you take a cab?" he said contemptuously. It was Van.

"I don't want one. I'm not tired." That was our meeting.

He didn't say anything more, but hailed a cab from across the street. I refused to accept it, but he insisted harshly. The driver looked around in surprise and I got in. He knew I was one of the young ladies dancing for a fashionable charity. More than that, I was afraid someone might come from the hall and see us wrangling.

"Drive on," Van said, seating himself beside me. The horse floundered out of the snowdrift and went on down Boylston Street.

I was silent. Why had Van come when I was so broken! He had no reproaches for me; perhaps they died on his lips as mine had always done when I saw him after a long interval. Yet it

seemed impossible that our positions could be reversed.

"You look tired, Missy," he said gently. He started to put his arm around me.

I resisted him. "I'm not tired at all. Please give the man my address, Van; I want to get home."

"Wouldn't you like to come out and have dinner with me? The drive will do you good."

"No; I don't care to, thank you."

He lowered the window and gave my address. The cabby controlled his surprise and turned his horse's head toward the dividing bridge.

"Then I will go with you," said Van stubbornly.

"No, no!"

"Why not?"

"I don't want to see you."

"Can't you trust yourself?"

"Yes, I can," I cried in defiance.

"Prove it by letting me come up."

I felt helpless, but more from physical weakness than any moral oozing of my courage. "I can't talk with you to-night."

"When can you?"

"Why, never."

"Nonsense. Everything has to shape itself—have a definite end. This affair of ours has been hanging long enough."

"You're wrong," I insisted. "It's already finished, done, done, done with."

"Do you think that this society-dancing stunt is going to take the place of anything big in your life?"

He made my weak attempts seem just as immature as I myself was feeling them to be. But I tried to be proud. "I think it's the beginning," I concluded.

"Rot. You're not a dancer."

"Who told you that?" I must have screamed, for someone on the pavement looked in at us. What if that was the gossip of the club. What if I really was a failure!

"I'm not talking," he answered, "but I know as well as you do how you got the job."

"How?" I asked, confused and curious.

"Don't play such a tiny baby. I heard weeks ago how these women went to Rafferty to arrange for the hall—which he owns—and he offered them the whole place for nothing if they engaged you as the solo dancer."

I peered at him through the gloom. "Is that really the truth? Really, oh, Van, really?"

He peered back at me. "Do you mean to say you didn't know?"

"I've never lied to you, Van. I didn't know."

"That's right, you've never lied." There was a silence. "Well, how do you and Rafferty stand then?" He had to repeat his question, for I wasn't listening to him. "Come, now, Missy, let's have the whole truth."

"I'm not thinking about Rafferty," I said after his prodding. "I don't know anything about him."

I was thinking of something much more vital. If Mr. Rafferty secured this appearance for me, then, after all, I really might not be a good dancer. And if I wasn't a good dancer then I had not gone on at all. I was nowhere. I was just nowhere. I put my hand to my head with a moan.

Instantly Van responded to my weakness. "Missy, darling, let me rest you. Dance your little head off if you want to, sweetheart, but don't dance your little heart out."

I beat him off. "It's my head and my heart and my soul that are in this dancing, or that ought to be. It's all I have, and I thought it was given to me as a beautiful gift. Why, if I'm wrong — if I'm wrong —" It was too unspeakable.

The cab drew up in front of the door and stopped. Van held me back as I struggled to get out. "You can go, don't be scared. But on the day after the performance I'm coming to hear how it's all turned out. Perhaps you'll be ready for me, then, 'if you're wrong.' And don't you turn me away or I'll break your bally door down. I'll be there at four."

So that's the way it stands, and to-morrow night I'm to pay for the hall — and be suffered to dance.

XXIII

It must be two in the morning. Jimmy kept the furnace fire up so that I would be warm when I came in. The performance is over. Miss Mercy did die. I look out of the window and pause before I write anything more, because, right after speaking of her death, I must say something bright and joyous, and it is cruel. But — I can dance! I can dance!

It was dreadful how I learned of Miss Mercy's going away. Mrs. Reed came in and told me as I was starting over to the hall at seven this evening. Mrs. Short puffed up after her, and was furious. "Only a good woman could be as cruel as this," she said to Mrs. Reed. She didn't care if she moved — not at that moment.

I was putting a few things in my little bag. Some extra hair pins and an old shawl for the "waits." I went right on collecting them while Mrs. Reed told me about Miss Mercy. She had had a sudden hemorrhage and had cried out: "Not so soon, God." Then after a little, she had died.

"Don't let it upset you, my dear," urged Mrs. Short after she had invited Mrs. Reed from the

room. In spite of the death she and Jimmy were going to the performance, and her silk dress rustled anxiously.

"Upset me?" I repeated vaguely. "Why, no, I shall have to go just the same." Miss Mercy's dying had been one of the fears that had hung over me. Now I put it all aside and went on. My dancing was pretty big to *me*, even if it wasn't any good.

"If death doesn't stand in the way of my trying to succeed," I thought as I drove over in the carriage which Mrs. Abbott had sent for me, "then I ought to be able to rise above any other condition that tends to drag me down." In this grim way Miss Mercy's dying encouraged me. The poor dear friend, she had lived for others, she had died for them. The pathos of her living, not her death, brought tears to my eyes.

But I found that I could banish them when, arriving at the hall, I began putting on my make-up. They must not spoil my rouge or streak my eyes. Nothing must disturb me. Girls of my age, but younger somehow, were running about in the corridors giggling with excitement. The committee were all giving orders, different ones, to the same people. The tuning of the instruments added to the chaos, but I would not let the chaos past my door. I felt hardened cement outside and oiled machinery inside.

Theodora, who had come direct from the train,

was the only one with me. She was very efficient and wouldn't loan my rouge to any one. I wanted to ask her about Mr. Rafferty but I didn't dare for fear what Van said was true. I would have gone down to his office and asked him myself, had not the same dread held me back. It didn't make any difference anyway. I was there to dance, not to ask how I happened to dance.

"If it means anything to you, Missy," said Theodora, as we were called to the stage, "you never looked more efficient, somehow, than you do to-night."

"That means a lot to me," I answered her. "If I succeed to-night perhaps we'll have classes together. You can teach the voice."

She looked gloomy. "I couldn't stand these girls, my dearest; I'd rather have the deaf mutes, but I think I'll have New York — and the stage."

"Think of any one wanting it," I murmured as I moved toward the great bare space. In the wings was my ballet mistress, the one with whom I had always been sympathetic, and who had found out before I had that a woman couldn't escape from the beat of her pulses by crawling into a corner. I had tried that and not very successfully. Now I looked out upon the open place where I was soon to move, with hundreds watching me. There was no longer any crawling for me.

"It seems enormous," I said as I reached my instructor's side.

"That hasn't anything to do with you," she retorted, almost angry in her nervousness. "You stop thinking about externals. You think about your dance steps. The first time you appeared at school you were a failure because you probably were entertaining some sentimental nonsense which was going to uplift you. There's just as much in this as there is in keeping books."

I was glad to find the instructor so practical. It gave me something to hold on to, but I had to have it out with her. "You said once that everything was on my side: grace, good looks, and the quality that made the passerby look twice. You didn't say anything, then, about counting."

"Those are the attributes you are born with. You put those out of your reckoning. You haven't anything to do with them — you count your dance steps."

I went on, feeling braced rather than discouraged. If I kept my mind on my steps I wouldn't have time to think of people staring at me. I walked to my place behind the long floral screen at the back. The orchestra rolled up in a volume of sound that went on through my body like the vibrations of a harp.

Theodora was secreted back there with me, for I was to slip quickly from the Spring costume that I was wearing to those of Summer, Autumn and

Winter, and the changes must be made there. The dance of the seasons was to be the first part of the programme. The girls didn't change beyond carrying different garlands. We could hear them tittering in the wings as they waited to file on. How they could laugh!

All of a sudden the music grew louder, and Theodora, who was peeking through, whispered, "The curtain's up." The dancers came on from either side. They formed their first picture, and a sound like the bursting of bags reached our ears. "They're applauding," translated Theodora.

I looked through the hedge of flowers for the first time. I had been preparing myself for the great emptiness of the dress rehearsal; now all the space seemed solidly filled; not only the seats but the whole area of the theater was vibrant with people, so wonderfully does humanity pervade space. Far from being afraid of these people, I was delighted that they were there. Those dots of black and white were much more encouraging than the red backs of unresponsive chairs. Then I realized that I must give no more time to them, but listen to the measures that I might dance out from the screen exactly on the beat. Waiting was terrible. It was like playing over and over on the G string of the violin.

When I came out there was some hand clapping from the top gallery, and I knew that the girls from the school were there — where I had so often

been. It was curious, but the personal enthusiasm didn't help me at all — the moment was too big. After all, a public dancer must win the public. Our friends, I am afraid, will go in a pint cup.

We danced Spring and it went quite well, although a number of the flowers didn't come up in time, which is the way of plants. One also fell and got stepped on. Instinctively I danced in front of her as she sprawled. With the terrors at seeing her fall came delight that I needed all the brain I had — and more — for this "pirouetting." The conviction grew as we went on through the seasons that any poor work has to have mind in it. And it is the use of our minds which keeps us sane and good.

By the time we had reached Winter I found, too, that I was not only responsible for my solo work, but as the soloist and leader I must take care of all the others. The weight of the task almost crushed me, at first, then I lifted it — inversely, I clung to it. Here was a task of a lifetime before me. No more moping if I was to be a leader.

The applause was very good when we had finished the first part. I was glad for the girls' sake but I didn't take a great deal of it to myself. They might be "suffering" me for the use of the hall. I didn't want to speak to any one of the committee who were fluttering around. I feared

the falseness of their compliments. But I sought my instructor.

"You're all right," she said, "but —"

"You mean the girls?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to lift them up in this Bacchanalian dance. I'm going to soar and they have to go with me."

"Right," she answered.

I felt, in the Bacchanale, that I could add to the mechanism of the steps some of the spirit which I once thought entirely comprised dancing. It was like dropping oil, slowly, certainly, as one makes a salad dressing. But I was sure first of the other ingredients. I slipped through the screen and whirled in a circle around them. "Come on," I cried; "come on."

I laughed at some, pulled at the costumes of others. One of them thought it was a game of tag and broke her line to follow after me. "Keep your step," I snapped at her.

She retired, but the flame was among us. I doubt if they danced as well, but they danced more successfully. I was working correctly and yet with a semblance of abandon. The thought came to me that our spirit of dancing is like the passions of life; they are to use, but to control if we are to enjoy them. The music grew wilder toward the end. I began to laugh, hoping that the girls would catch the infection. They were

in for any kind of fun. They laughed with me and the curtains fell as we rioted — in order and in step.

The applause was tremendous. I was so delighted with the chorus that, after two calls, I slipped away that they might get the glory, but some ran to the wings when the curtain was up and pulled me out again. It was like a kiss on the lips to hear the swelling up of appreciation when I came on again.

As I turned to my dressing-room for my change, Mrs. Abbott followed and put her arms around me. "You are making the success that we were all sure you would," she said. "We were all too occupied yesterday to find time to say so."

So much for self-torture. Yet I looked at her searchingly. "Tell me, please, how did you happen to choose me?"

"We were speaking of that the other night, trying to trace back our good fortune. We have a Mr. Rafferty to thank for it. He suggested you when we came to ask for a permit to give the dance."

"Oh! He owns this hall, doesn't he?"

"Good gracious, no! My husband owns it."

A lump rose up in my throat. Perhaps it was the one that had been lifted from my heart. So Van had lied to me!

"I must change," I said suddenly. I wanted to tell her, but there are some things in my life

that I can never explain to Mrs. Abbott and her friends. She saw my emotion.

"Not a tear," she warned.

I smiled out of the little cloud. "No, indeed. There is the waltz ahead of me — the real test." I went cheerily back to my business.

The waltz was mine. The chorus came on only at the end. For the first time I was to do it all alone. The little knot of friends could not help me sway that crowd. Nothing but my dancing could do it, "My dancing." I could be proud of it after all, that was my consolation. It would not be my weak self that was to do it — I was glad of that — it was to be the strongest part of me. I loved it. My gift was fighting for my future. If it won, there would be no fear of Vans and Raffertys. "Education is a young girl's armor," the president had said. This was my armor.

When the curtain rose, I was coiled up among the flowers on the mossy bank. The music awakened me. It was very lovely. As I lay there, the odor of cigarettes and a man's hair dressing filled my nostrils. I thought of the day Van came in and put his head beside me as I slept. My limbs stirred and my opening palms pushed away his memory. Van was music to me once, but he is no longer that.

When I lifted myself from the flowers the house applauded. They were glad to see me

there — the dancer. When I smiled at them, the applause came up in another wave. They were glad to see me there — the woman. "That is where the personality comes in," I told myself, "but art comes first."

The joyous waltz carried me around the stage. I was doing all things. I was counting. I was calculating distances. I was careful of the slippery places on the floor. There was the sway of the body with the sway of the soul to add to my happiness. But the task was not yet done. As I had made the girls swing to my spirit I must now find that same rhythm in the hearts of the men and women who were watching me. We must be one beating whole. Here must be expended the soul, mind and body.

The music went drifting on. The frequent bursts of applause ceased but the feeling of success continued. And then I understood, for, at last, they were all dancing with me in their hearts. We were in unison. And yet — and yet — though the harmony was perfect, we were not of one mind at all.

They may have been thinking of their sweethearts, those men out there, of women to be married or of those only to be cared for. Old loves, young loves, loves that never were, may have crossed the mental vision of the women. Rich, sensuous living may have crept into the spirit of the moment, or pure dreams, as exquisite as the

music, may have stood to them for desire. Those may have been their phantasies as our hearts were dancing altogether — but they were not mine. It was so splendid. I hadn't any time for dreams. I was just counting, and minding my steps, and trying, by all that I had learned of men and women, to deceive the audience into believing that I, the dancer, was feeling just as they were. And that was my work — forever.

I can't remember the rest. So many calls, bowing, thinking suddenly of Miss Mercy, kissing Theodora wildly, and once seeing Mr. Rafferty clapping noisily as he sat on the very front row. I smiled down at him. He had helped me, and there had been no toll.

To-morrow — it is now to-day — I'm to go to the country with Mrs. Abbott for a while, "to talk over plans and rest," she said. But I am to see Van at four this afternoon.

It is very late. This is the time for Miss Mercy to begin coughing. Dear Miss Mercy. I am so full of life, and she is so through with it.

XXIV

WHEN he came in I was almost impatient because I hadn't finished packing. Then I noticed that my heart was fluttering, and I know, now, that it will flutter for a long time to come whenever I meet him, because he stands for something that makes a great division in my life. Yet I hope that I won't meet him often, if ever again.

I saw him as he passed into the doorway just as I had seen him when he entered the drawing-room of Mrs. Croakes over a year ago. My vision was not blinded by fondness then or now; his real self was even more clear than at first, for wisdom has come to me. This is his punishment. All that he has taught me has shot back as a boomerang to him, making his faults plain. I saw his ugly mouth and teeth, and cold gray eyes, but more than that, I recognized the emptiness of his pompous manner. The very sophistication which association with him had given me showed how poorly he contrasted with other men I have met.

At first there was a fat smile on his face. I could imagine his attack. He was going to be firm with me, but after a little he would make con-

cessions, and when I had suffered sufficiently we would complete arrangements for our continued happiness. He threw himself into the big chair and held out his hand to me. I shook my head and sat on the couch opposite him.

"Not even on the little stool?" he asked with his brows in that perfect arch.

"I've come to the conclusion that the little stool is uncomfortable."

"I shall never ask you again," he said importantly.

That incident being closed, there was nothing more to say. He went on. "I saw you last night — bully!"

"Thank you, Van."

"It made me want to pick you up and crush you in my arms."

"Did you like my dancing?"

"I wanted to crush you in my arms." But I could see that he was proud of me, and I wondered if he was afraid of me. We talked of the evening.

"You lied to me about Rafferty, Van."

"I quoted the gossip of the club."

"I don't believe it."

He waved the subject aside, and became more intense. "You know me; I'd use any method to get the girl I love."

Love! The poor word. How it has suffered up and down the streets of the world.

"You can't ever get me, Van."

"Why not?"

"I don't love *you*."

He laughed. He had heard women say that before, no doubt. Then he assumed his deep note. "An emotional experience like ours can't die. We've proven that."

"How?"

"I've tried to throw you. You've tried to throw me. Here we are together again."

He endeavored to give an intimacy to the scene which did not exist. I looked at him, feeling sorry for the me which was dead. It would so have enjoyed being here. It would have fed happily for a long time on what had been said already.

"I'm going out in the country with Mrs. Abbott to-morrow. We shan't ever be together again probably — you and I."

He threw back his head and exhaled a long thin line of smoke. He always looked very well with his head far back and his eyes slanting down. "Do you think you're finished — finished with this Columbus Avenue life?"

"I shall come back to complete my course, and I'm going to stay on here. Theodora counts on it, as she comes every Saturday, you know. But, even so, I'm pretty well finished."

"It's in your blood, my dear."

He had expected an outcry, the customary beat-

ing of wings, but I didn't mind much. "I know why you've so often told me that, Van."

"Why?"

"It weakens a girl's defenses when she has no opinion of herself. A girl must be as proud as Lucifer of her goodness if she wants to preserve it."

He was very hurt. "I've always sheltered you."

"Oh, yes, you wanted to teach me life beautifully." I smiled forlornly at the recollection of my lessons.

"Well, didn't I teach you?"

"You began in a private room of a hotel with an unsavory reputation. You made me feel provincial when I balked at going to your rooms, and to your kissing me before your servant. You always made me feel mean when I wanted to be good."

"You're getting very careful with yourself, aren't you?" he sneered. "That's something new."

"It is every woman's business but I have been long about it. You impressed me with the sensation that it wasn't any use in my being fine — that I hadn't a chance."

"I doubt if you had, in these surroundings. You put yourself here; I didn't do it."

"Yes, I did it all. I came very near throwing myself over the bridge just before I reached Mrs.

Croakes' the first night. I have thought a good many times since that it would have been wiser if I had done so, because I didn't believe there was any way out of it. You assured me that one of my type couldn't do any better for herself. You didn't want me to move, this suited you."

"It suited you, too, didn't it?"

"I was poor, and after a while I took it all for granted. You called what I was learning growth—you wanted to see me grow, I remember."

"And didn't you grow?"

"I didn't grow in any direction but yours; that was what you planned for."

"You didn't do any better when you tried to manage for yourself. A nice bunch—those Raffertys."

"Of course that was wrong. I was trying to do it all myself, and the result of my effort was bad because my direction was faulty. Now I'm on the straight road."

He arose and came over to the couch beside me. Always before I have had to come to him. He tried to take one of my hands in his as he seated himself. I had been sitting very upright with my ten fingers interlocked. They refused to come apart, and he held, rather clumsily, my knitted fists together.

This was very hard for his pride, and he thought it time to hurt me. "I suppose you fancy

that you have said good-by to your emotional life. It is only moving over to higher priced quarters. Bah!" He dropped my woven-together fingers as though they were contaminating. They disentangled themselves, and lay idly in my lap as my thoughts softened.

"It seems to me, Van, that I've had enough emotion in my life to last a long time. I sometimes feel burned out by fires too hot for my age. I expect they will come again, for I watch the lives of these women around me, and I know that good and bad women are only slightly different. The rules of life remain the same. But the next time I hope I shall be better prepared to meet the flames. I hope they won't be fierce fires at all, just logs on the hearth stone. But the coming of love again is not troubling me now. One would think, in this neighborhood, that there is nothing else in life but falling in love and suffering over it, but I've found a whole world full of interesting, animating topics."

"What makes you think you've stopped caring for me?" He always asked such questions in a pretense at jest. He was too proud to show that they were of any concern to him.

"Answer me," he pressed; "what made you stop?"

"You," I replied.

"Me?" Anything with him in it, he rather liked.

I nodded.

"Poor Missy," was his sudden gentle comment, "don't you know that men love most when they're most brutal?" I believed that Van was sincere in this. He always thought that he was most a man when he was cruel.

"I don't mind your having been unkind to me — not any more," I said tranquilly. He got up and walked about in a bewildered way, eyeing me. "When we have to get over caring for a good man there is a great deal to overcome, but when we love a man who hasn't been kind there is nothing to forget but our infatuation. No woman really likes the bad traits."

"Sophistry!" he exclaimed, walking up and down the room. "Those women over there have soaked you full of meaningless phrases already. Cult, all cult. Why, you're one of the cults, too. In a little while they will be through with you."

"I expect they will," I answered. "That is why I must do the most with my opportunity. First, one makes an impression, and then one must make good."

"What do you propose to do in the future?"

"Some day I may become a dancer. I'm not afraid any more, for it isn't a sensuous life; it's hard work. But for a while, until I know more and get money to study, I am going to teach."

"You're going to teach," stopping before me. "Whom?"

"Girls."

"Girls! Good God!"

That brought me to my feet. "What do you mean?"

My anger added to his. "They will be interesting classes. Are they to learn everything you know?"

"I'm to teach dancing; I can protect them from everything I know."

"You protect them! When you know as much about girls as I do, my dear, you will find that the presence of evil is quite sufficient for them. They are eager for it and they absorb it. Look what you have done."

We were both trembling with rage. "Van, I forbid you to say anything more."

"Pooh! Forbid! Why, you'll never be able to keep your classes —"

"I'm going to, I tell you —"

"You will attract the brothers and the sweet-hearts, and the husbands."

"That isn't true. I haven't done it. That isn't true."

"There will be gossip."

"I've done nothing, nothing wrong."

"And there'll be hell to pay until you're back among your own again."

My face quivered, made grimaces, from the nausea of disgust, but I controlled myself.

"Van, I want you to go. I've treated you

with consideration too long. I'm sick of you. You don't frighten me one bit. Yours is the common view-point of a common man. Yes, a second-rate man, in birth, breeding, and social position. I've felt it for a long time. Now I've said it — and I want you to go."

"Who told you that?" he blurted out.

I felt sorry for him. His face was flushed like a schoolboy's. Even in Columbus Avenue a girl student had found him lacking in the elements of polite living which he so greatly valued. I made no reply, and thrashing himself into the noisy rage which his kind most enjoy, he lashed at me.

"You little country jake. You dare to sit in judgment on me. By God, what a nerve, and I taught you the use of a fork! You meet a few fashionable people and now you go off with your Mrs. Abbott and give me a nod of good-by. You take up with a lot of anæmic men and women and think you're in that sacred circle for good. Won't you get the bounce when you're discovered at your old tricks! Don't think you won't go back to them. It's in you. We all find our level — you'll get back to yours. And don't you come to me then. I don't want you faded. A faded fool is the saddest thing on earth except a faded tart. You'll be both. Now you're just a pretty ninny — a pretty one — and a tart — a tart — do you hear?"

He called me other names.

The tears came into my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. Oh, the pity of it! The pity of it! That I could have loved him, and found beautiful traits in him, and that I must see him this way. He had held me in his arms, knowing me to be a good girl, and now his words were like slime on my head.

Suddenly he saw my tears as I stood watching him pitch about the room, with his mouth full of curses for me. He hesitated, eyeing me coarsely. His rage left him, or it had, by some subtlety of nature, twisted from one passion into another more menacing. His arms wrapped around me; his hands ceaselessly caressed me; his words continued in a torrent.

“Missy — my own — my girl — this is the way to love — isn’t it, isn’t it — fire, little girl — red flames — we know, don’t we — listen to me — don’t struggle — you’ve every right to stay here — listen to me — it’s just come to me — you’re game — you’re what I’m looking for — you held out — you’re great — I’m for you — always, always — now listen — I’ll marry you — Yes, love, I will — you’ll be my wife — it’s the right end — we’re meant for each other — don’t cry, girl — it’s going to be all right — Missy, I’m going to marry you — I’ve made the *amende* now — the *amende honorable*, haven’t I — do you

hear me — Missy — answer me — I'm not going to give you up — Missy, speak — say something — say — MISSY! "

When I am very old I shall still hear Van's cry of my name. I shall still feel the lunge of his body as he pushed me back to see if it could be true — to see, not only to hear, that I was laughing at him!

He didn't speak again. It was all over. He knew it. When he passed through the door he had his coat and hat. I wondered at the time how he got them; I wondered, too, how I could wonder over such a simple thing, but I kept on laughing. The front door banged and I was still faintly chuckling. But by the time I heard the postman's whistle I had quite stopped.

The metal clap of the lid sounded against the iron of the letter box, and I went down to see if Mrs. Abbott had sent me a time-table. She had, and Pearl received a letter, too. She had to go right out. When I returned to my dim room the lamps were glowing in from the street, and the globe of the pharmacy was shedding its colors impartially about.

The ruby ray that I once called "Mr. Ruyne" drenched the white of my blouse with mechanical regularity. But I attached no significance to it. When my own light was on, I unfolded the time-table. At first glance it would seem to be a long,

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hard journey, but I searched until I found a better way. And that is a good deal like my life, I think.

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